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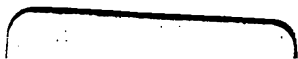
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An Australian Tale.

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SOCIAL LIFE IN SYDNEY;

OR,

COLONIAL EXPERIENCE.

An Australian Tale.

BY

ISABEL MASSARY.

"Australia's skies are clear and bright,
And brighter still they seem,
Now that I only picture them
In memory's waking dream."

M. H. R.

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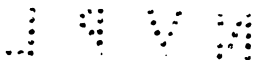
COLONIAL EXPERIENCE.

CHAPTER I.

DURING the most palmy days of this colony, when the opening for speedily acquiring wealth was day by day tempting persons of enterprise to quit their own country for Australia, none arrived with brighter prospects and more sanguine hopes than Edmund Milner ; and, indeed, there united in his position a variety of advantageous circumstances which gilded the advent of his residence in Sydney. Agreeable, good-looking, and of rising fortune, he was received at once as a distinguished addition to society. His steadiness of principle and zeal for personal improvement rendered him a most desirable companion to young men of his own age ; while the considerable capital he brought out to invest, and the energy with which he turned to business, insured him the favour of those whose views were directed to the main chance. His ability and clear judgment seemed to point him out as one likely to become useful as a member of Council, and who, being supported by excellent connexions at home, might hereafter materially

promote the interests of the colony. As some few years passed on, and the germs of youthful character expanded into ripeness, much of this fair promise was realised. Mr Milner did prosper in his profession; he did continue to improve his abilities, as well as to test them, by his avocations in the world; he was still as agreeable in society, and in time he married. This last event was in his life a more important era than marriage usually is in a *man's* career. At the time, it was a good deal talked of, but, like any other piece of gossip, the subject had its day, and was then discarded, and, tattle ceasing, Mr Milner was left in peace to enjoy the society of the wife whom he had chosen.

The home to which he brought her was a cottage, where he had lived ever since his arrival in the colony, first renting and finally purchasing it; it was a small though gentlemanly residence, the front windows of which overlooked the harbour; the drawing-room being on the ground-floor, opened by glass doors on to the veranda, and beyond lay a garden and little shrubbery. When living alone, Mr Milner had studied neatness and comfort in all his arrangements; and certain expensive books which graced his shelves, and his few choice prints and busts, might, by those of similar taste, have been called enviable luxuries; but of luxury, in the ordinary acceptation of the term, there was none; it was only on his marriage that his home was beautified and adorned, and then was added, both to the cottage and to the garden, everything that could please a female taste that the most considerate affection could devise. And who that beheld the charm thrown over those simple though pretty apartments by the music,



work, and gaily-bound volumes, contrasting with the signs of a man's exclusive taste,—who that saw the sweet look of gratitude which acknowledged all this as done for her, or noted the brightened tone and smile with which Margaret ever turned to meet her husband, would hesitate to say that the spirit of happiness must be the permanent guest of such a home? And none ventured to doubt that they were happy, though few could speak as witnesses, as from the day of his marriage Mr Milner's relations with society became changed; no wedding-cards announced the event, no wedding visits were paid or received, no invitations flowed in upon him and his bride; the gentlemen who had been his most intimate friends he met for a time much as before, but by degrees old companionships dropped off, until at length he was never seen, and his name was seldom mentioned, even in houses where he had once been a constant guest. The day was given exclusively to business, and in the evening he rode home alone, and devoted the leisure which he had formerly spent in society to systematic study. Margaret too, though alone the greater portion of the morning, sought not for that companionship which might have suited her age and her solitary position, but beguiled the long hours of her husband's absence by needlework, varied with reading, when the weather was cool enough, tending the flowers in her garden; and when a year or two added to her cares and her quiet pleasures by the birth of a son, soon followed by that of a daughter, she occupied herself much with them, took them their daily walks, and seemed to cast no glance of envy on either the exciting amusements or social employments of the world

around. And why was this? Why, when means were ample to allow the enjoyment of society, were even its most harmless amusements avoided? Why did Margaret, gifted with a gentleness and beauty that might please in any circle, reserve her smiles for her husband alone, in the seclusion of their cottage and its garden? And why did he, whose superior mind delighted in intercourse with the intellect of others, hold converse with his books alone, neither seeking, nor sought by, his fellow-men?

The advent of a visitor was a rare event; and a gentleman who had been sitting with Mr Milner for half-an-hour having taken leave, Mr Milner sought his wife in the garden. To discuss with his Margaret any subject which interested him, even when it did not so immediately concern her as the affairs of her own only brother, was ever his first impulse—that with which he closed the study door on his books and papers, and directed his steps through the flowering shrubbery and trellised walk, shaded by fruit-laden grenadilla and grape vines, to the spot where she was employing the hour before sundown in gardening, assisted by her little boy, who, proud to believe himself of use, collected the weeds in his little barrow, as fast as she hoed them up. But when Mr Milner came in sight of her he insensibly hesitated, and said to himself half aloud, “May it not vex her? she is so fond of her brother, and if true, it is probably some headlong fancy of Master Gerald’s;” for, interested in her girlish employment, surrounded by her flowers, with her child companion, she looked so youthful, calm, and simple, that at the moment he regarded her less as his friend and confidant than as

the being whom it was his wish to shield from even trivial annoyances. And her figure, as it came before him, might not unnaturally suggest such careful consideration; the most unreflecting would know that, sure as the flowers she was tending would fade, and storms obscure the blue of the summer sky above her, the progress of time must inevitably bring troubles to dim the deep lustre of those dark eyes, and steal the bloom which tinted the soft downy cheek; yet not the less unwillingly would affection anticipate the unavoidable ills of advancing life. Perhaps, however, young and innocent as she was, she had already known sorrow; or it might be only the duties of a wife and mother which, often dwelt upon, had reflected on her face an expression, not less pleasing than is common in youth, but different, thoughtful, far more subdued; repose was there, but the play of feature proceeding from gay and careless spirits was wanting; her voice was pensive, and her eyes usually bent to the ground. Before Mr Milner reached her, his little son gave notice of his approach by the exclamation of "Papa." Margaret hastily finished tying up a carnation; and stooping for that purpose, her broad straw hat for a moment concealed her face, and when she raised it the grave look had given place to the smile with which she addressed her husband. "I was just coming to tell you, Edmund, that it is time to put away your books, and look at what I have been doing here."

"And have you been so very busy," said Mr Milner, "that you could not come to see Mr Parks?"

"Should I have come?" she asked, looking up with something of painful diffidence. "I thought that as you

and Mr Parks were such old friends, you would have so much to say to each other that"—

"That you might indulge your love of escaping strangers," observed Mr Milner, with a smile; "but Parks and I had not a great deal to say to each other; he called, I believe, only in fulfilment of a promise."

"I am surprised," said Margaret; "you have told me you were such friends."

"Early friendships do not always continue, though Parks did give me an invitation to dine to-morrow."

"Which you accepted, I hope?"

"No, I declined."

"O Edmund, why?"

"Because I am happier at home, Margaret," replied Mr Milner, simply.

Margaret looked disappointed, and, after a few minutes, said, somewhat constrainedly, "I hope, Edmund, it is not on my account you refused to dine with your old friend. You know it would rather amuse me to hear a description of a dinner party, and I should like to have heard about Mrs and Miss Parks."

"The ladies of the family are not at home, they have gone to Paramatta for a few days," answered Mr Milner.

Simple as was the remark, it caused the blood to mount into Margaret's face; for the few words evidently conveyed to her far more than to a bystander they would seem to imply.

"Papa," interrupted the little boy, at this point of the conversation, "come and see how nice mamma and I have made this flower-bed."

"Yes, show me, Freddy, what you have been doing," said Mr Milner; but though he allowed himself to be drawn away by the child, he glanced back anxiously at his wife, and reading, apparently, in her countenance something that did not satisfy him, he the next moment returned to her side.

"Margaret, are we not independent of society? If we are happy in each other, may we not disregard other things?"

"For myself, Edmund, you cannot doubt that I think so," and she raised her soft eyes almost swimming in tears; "but for you and the children I feel many things; and I own I sometimes grieve to think of the disadvantage under which that boy will enter the world."

"Freddy will enter the world," replied Mr Milner, "as every one else does, to encounter a great many trials, but these we will teach him are to be met cheerfully; and as long as he does his duty he will always have the approbation of his own conscience and the respect of his fellow-men."

"The former I trust he always will have," observed Margaret, "the latter must be a great comfort; but do not you feel, Edmund, that though our children should grow up inferior to none, nay, though Freddy should be superior to half the young men in the colony, and though Edith should be ever so amiable and good, the world will not admit their merit?"

"The world again, Margaret?" said Mr Milner; "and must I—a man of the world, who never set up to be anything more, or who, at least, am indebted for any concep-

tion I may have of a higher standard to your purer, better example—must I tell you that we ought not so much to regard the world?”

Margaret blushed a confession of her fault in the un-vindicating humility of an ingenuous child.

“But now,” resumed Mr Milner, in a lighter tone, “you have not heard my news; if you had come to see Mr Parks you would have heard of Gerald: he met him in England.”

“Dear Gerald!” said Margaret; “I would have come had I guessed that: he was well I hope?”

“Perfectly; he mentioned having written to you by the *Queen*, which ought to be here now; he has got, Parks says, into very good society.”

“I am glad to hear that from some one besides himself,” observed Margaret, with a smile; “Gerald always piqued himself on his tact for getting on in society.”

“I suspect that for his reception in English society he is less indebted to his assumed tact than to his good looks, which are a favourable letter of introduction; and to do him justice, he is a very engaging-mannered boy.”

“Boy!” repeated Mrs Milner; “to what age does boyhood extend? Gerald is twenty-three.”

“Is he so much? I am sorry for it.”

“Why? do you consider it such a very mature age?”

“Not at all; but Gerald’s character is not so formed as it might be, though his defects are nothing very serious if we regard them as the follies of extreme youth; but if there is not that excuse, why, the case is not so hopeful. However, you are right, we must give up calling him a boy, for Parks heard a report that he is to be married.”

Margaret looked eagerly interested. "What did he say?" she asked.

"He really could give me no information, beyond that your brother was very intimate in the family of a naval officer, Captain Fane; and just as Parks was leaving England, he heard that he was engaged to the eldest daughter."

"I remember," said Margaret; "in his recent letters, Gerald has often mentioned a young Mr Fane, who was his friend at Cambridge, and who introduced him to his family: what does Mr Parks say of them?"

"He was not personally acquainted with them, but knows them to be people of good family and fortune, and highly respected in their own neighbourhood."

"That all sounds very well," remarked Margaret. She looked down thoughtfully until Mr Milner said, "What are you thinking of, Margaret? Trying to picture your rattle-brain brother with the cares and dignity of a married man?"

"No, I was not; I was thinking, Edmund, that if this report is true, there is another person in the world as generous as you."

"I do not consider that I evinced any generosity, Margaret—I was only just; but I do consider that before marriage there should be *no concealment* of any family circumstances; now the question is, whether Gerald has acted thus honourably towards Miss Fane?"

"O Edmund, how can you!" Margaret began, but she stopped abruptly, and added, after an embarrassed pause, "Gerald is my only brother, and generous and

warm-hearted he has always been ; he would have shared his fortune freely with me ; and the pleasure of seeing him grow up so amiable, and clever, and handsome, was the greatest comfort my poor mother had, at a time when, Heaven knows, she had need of comfort. Do not teach me to distrust him."

"Until forced to doubt, we will, of course, believe everything in his favour," said Mr Milner ; "and probably a few days will bring us a letter from Gerald himself."

They had, meanwhile, been walking slowly towards the house, and the conversation was here interrupted by the sight of a stranger advancing up the avenue, and within a few paces of the porch. She was a young woman of unassuming figure, and plainly, though respectably dressed ; there were traces of tears on her face, and she seemed too much preoccupied to care to conceal the signs of her distress.

"Is not that Mrs Pryn, the wife of your deformed clerk?" inquired Margaret.

"It is, and I am sorry for it ; I was obliged this morning to part with him, and if, as I suspect, her visit is in consequence of her husband's dismissal, it is quite superfluous."

"I thought," said Margaret, "that Mr Pryn was a very superior, clever man."

"He is a man," replied Mr Milner, "whose abilities are a misfortune to him, and who will never come to any good."

The young woman met them, and begging the favour of a few minutes' conversation with Mr Milner, entered at

once on what he had rightly conjectured to be the purport of her call.

With great earnestness she represented the importance to her family of his support, which she trusted had not been entirely forfeited by a first, and what certainly should be a last piece of negligence on the part of her husband, for whom she entreated forgiveness, and at least another trial. Mr Milner listened to her politely, but replied, "Negligence in business, Mrs Pryn, is, in my eyes, a very serious fault. Had your husband borne in mind what I told him at the beginning of our engagement, he need never have lost the situation; I hope the lesson will make him more prudent in his next."

"His next!" repeated Mrs Pryn; "he never will obtain another; his health fits him for only light occupation; and you must remember, sir, you gave him the situation when no other would receive him; you have been a kind friend to us, and now for a first fault is he to forfeit his only means of giving his children bread?"

"I am sorry for *you*, Mrs Pryn," replied Mr Milner, "but I have made a rule never to pass a first fault,—it has been my principle for many years." In despair at finding him so inflexible, the young woman again burst into tears. "And you, madam," she said, turning to Margaret, whose face expressed sincere sympathy, "will you not intercede for me? As you hope to retain the happiness"—But Mr Milner impatiently cut short the sentence: "If Mrs Pryn wishes to speak to me on any other subject, I am at leisure to attend to her; but if this is the only object of her visit, our intercourse had better be at an end." The young

woman moved away a few paces, but looked again imploringly at Margaret.

"Stop one minute, Mrs Pryn," said she, "I will indeed intercede for you." And, drawing her husband a little aside, she pleaded earnestly in behalf of these poor people. Mr Milner made no reply, but followed Mrs Pryn to where, at a little distance, she was awaiting his decision. In a few minutes the stranger was seen walking down the avenue, while he rejoined his wife; he looked perfectly unruffled, and stopped to gather a rose, of which he inhaled the perfume as he came forward. Margaret thought he could not be so placid unless his decision had been compassionate, and so she told him. He had decided as he believed justice warranted, but not as she wished. Mr Pryn had nothing to complain of. He explained clearly to every person who entered his employ that a single omission cost him the situation. He performed his duty towards his dependants, and expected them to do theirs. "And now," he ended by observing, "we will say no more about it. Freddy, come here;" he began, playing with the little boy, who ran towards him; while Margaret could not help thinking how strange it was that a person so fond of his own children should be so indifferent to the misery in which his harshness involved the helpless family of another.

CHAPTER II.

MRS MILNER and her brother were the children of Michael Bright, an Irishman, who in early life had come to Australia to push his fortunes, poor in worldly circumstances, and with doubtful pretensions as to birth, though much offended would he have been with any person who presumed to question his right to at least the appellation of a "gentleman."

He was a wild, reckless fellow, possessed of little education, but considerable natural acuteness, and an appearance superior to his condition, and in an evil day for her he won the heart of an amiable young woman who lived as nursery-governess in a respectable family in Sydney. The first few years after their marriage were passed on a remote, ill-managed cattle station, very insufficiently stocked, and totally destitute of all the comforts and conveniences of life. There this interval was chiefly spent by him in visits to the neighbouring township, lounging and smoking in the veranda, and in getting up rows with his men; by her in exerting a sadly-thrown-away influence to persuade him to a steadier life, and in bringing up her children, in spite of every disadvantage of example and situation, in good principles and good habits.

Owing, nevertheless, to his evident capacity, when he

chose to exert it, the semblance which, with an Irishman's tact, he could assume when it suited his purpose, of integrity and steadiness, and, as much as anything, the support of his really excellent wife's well-known worth, Bright contrived to establish a character far better than he deserved ; and when a restless desire for change induced him to quit that remote district for one which had been longer settled, he obtained the management of a large station, the purchase of a gentleman just arrived from England.

Mr Lancefield—for such was this gentleman's name—was unfitted, both by age and habits, to accommodate himself to a bush life ; residing, therefore, in the vicinity of Sydney, he intrusted to his superintendent the almost uncontrolled management of his country property.

From that day Bright grew rich by rapid steps ; as is not an uncommon arrangement, he had sheep of his own on the same run, the numbers of which marvellously increased, while the flocks of his employer dwindled away. For some time, though the remittances were small, Mr Lancefield's suspicions were lulled by the satisfactory state of the books which were shown to him ; and when he occasionally proposed visiting the station, to be present at a muster of his stock, some reason was always alleged why the visit should be deferred. At length, however, the investigation took place, and then he found that he had been deceived by entirely false statements, and that he was all but a ruined man. It was further seen, that in anticipation, probably, of being called upon to make restitution, Bright had a short time previously invested the whole of his property in the name of his son, with the exception of

a moderate annual allowance settled for life on his wife. Mr Lancefield went to law, but the case was one that is not strictly actionable, and the offence, which in justice should have been punished as fraud, was in law regarded only as breach of trust. Through a quibble of the law, Bright was acquitted, and Mr Lancefield was forced to abide by the sentence, being unable to support the expenses of prolonged litigation. But Bright had overshot his own mark; he was on the point of leaving the court, with an air of triumphant defiance, when he found himself detained on a second charge. The Attorney-General then proceeded to state that the prisoner had a few months before obtained an advance, according to custom, on wool that had just been shorn; that in place of handing the clip over to the party who had the lien over it, he had feloniously disposed of it to a merchant in Sydney. This charge was fully proved; and the jury returning a verdict of "Guilty," Bright was sentenced to fourteen years' penal servitude.

As soon as the result of the trial was known, his disgraced and unhappy wife embarked with her two children on board a small coaster for Sydney, in the hope of being allowed to visit her husband in prison before his sentence was carried into effect. There were several other passengers; and during the voyage, prolonged by adverse winds to several weeks, Mrs Bright was made to taste the full bitterness of her situation; she felt herself an object marked out for scorn and avoidance; one only treated her otherwise, and he—could she then have believed the horoscope which foretold it?—her future son-in-law, whose generous mind would not allow him to trample on one

already fallen, or add a feather's weight to the burden it was not in his power to remove. Mr Milner happened to be returning from — Bay, where he had been inspecting country, with a view to tender for a run; and he felt his sympathies drawn out for the mild, lady-like woman who never by word or glance resented whatever slights were put upon her, as well as interested in her two beautiful children—the fine open-browed boy, who moved and spoke as though he knew no reason why he should be ashamed to look man or heaven in the face; and the timid girl, who, clinging always close to her mother, seemed already almost to understand and enter into her feelings. He often joined this lone woman when she unassumingly took her place on the most retired part of the deck, and would draw the gentle little girl on to his knee, or warn Master Gerald against the dangerous places into which his fearless activity led him. They had heavy gales, and the vessel was in danger of being driven ashore, and then it was that Mr Milner's kindness was even more conspicuous; he felt for Mrs Bright, exposed with her young children to the risk of shipwreck without a friend on board; he thought of her because by every one else she was neglected; and while the others—both men and women—disregarded her anxious questions, he encouraged her with strong and hopeful words, brought her the earliest intelligence of improvement in the weather, and during this period of peril and discomfort, laid in her mind the foundation of a gratitude which at parting she assured him should be extinguished only with her life.

Mrs Bright saw the last of her husband in prison, prayed

and wept over him, and when he, in company with a gang of other convicts, was removed to his destination, she took for herself and children a house in Sydney, where she had no wish but to escape notice, in that obscurity which, in many cases, may be more easily found in a populous town than in any other spot.

Bearing the same dishonoured name, the stamp of indelible disgrace, alike the witness of their suffering mother pining beneath a calamity common to them all, the difference of character which was early developed in Margaret and Gerald may require to be accounted for ; but it seems a fact that a girl attains a maturity of thought and feeling far sooner than a boy, and thus Margaret appreciated with all its consequences the crime of her father at an age when her brother neither fully estimated nor much regarded it. There were circumstances also which kept up the delusion in his mind, and shielded him from those mortifications in the world to which his position laid him open. Being of necessity much his own master, his courageous spirit, graceful figure, and engaging manners gained him a great deal of notice from a set of persons who hang on the outskirts of society, and though ineligible for the circles from which he was himself excluded, had many of them wealth, and all a certain dash and style. These gentlemen, for their own amusement, encouraged his pertly sharp repartees, backed him to ride races, and took him to places and parties of amusement where little boys had no business. At school his position was much the same ; a general favourite with the masters for his quickness in learning, and loved by his companions for the liberality with which he

threw about his money ; cleverer, better dressed, handsomer and richer than the majority of his school-fellows, he acquired so strong a party that very rarely was he taunted with allusions to his parentage, especially as it was known, from one or two experiences, that his hot proud temper resented any such insults, whether intended as jest or earnest.

While Gerald was thus winning or fighting his way through life, (a mode of action which, he had no doubt, must answer equally well in the real world of which his school was the type,) his sister Margaret, the devoted companion of their mother, was acquiring a degree of thoughtful experience as unusual as it is little to be desired at her age. Mrs Bright's failing health detained her daughter constantly at home, and Margaret's time was passed between attending to her, picking up as she could a desultory and imperfect education, and in such household duties as their small establishment imposed ; the only little variety she ever enjoyed being on Sunday, when they went out for the purpose of twice attending church. In such a home, over which the very spirit of sadness seemed to reign, there was little congenial to Gerald ; and yet he loved his relatives, loved them with all the warmth of a heart which had good and generous impulses ; and in the anxious interest of his mother, and the affection of his gentle, thoughtful sister, there was something which, if it did not allure him to their company, he valued far more than the gaiety of those who were his chosen associates. This affection was shown by him in a way very characteristic. To his sister he would take presents of all manner of pretty things, and endeavour

to persuade her that she made herself low-spirited by staying so much in one dull house, and when she only half smiled and shook her head, he would recount the stories and adventures that most amused himself; and if, in the midst of his animated detail, he caught his mother's eye fixed anxiously upon him, he would check his flow of spirits, throw his arms around her neck, and begging her not to be always sad, assure her of all he would do to restore the respectability of the family; but ten minutes afterwards, when he had received her blessing and felt his own blooming cheek wetted by her tears, he would turn to the mirror, arrange his hair and cravat, and saunter out, with his pockets full of money and his head of day-dreams, to be caressed by companions and noticed by strangers.

Meanwhile Mr Milner had been carrying on a flourishing mercantile business, finding his friends among the first and most unexceptionable society the place afforded, and had entirely forgotten his 'board-ship acquaintances, until one day, coming out of one of the banks, he was suddenly stopped by a tall, handsome, very smartly dressed boy, who, with colonial freedom of manner, accosted him by name and claimed his acquaintance. Mr Milner was completely puzzled, he had not an idea who he was. "You have forgotten me," said Gerald, "but I can never forget you, and all the kindness you showed to my sister and myself on board the *Eagle* schooner." Mr Milner was won by the good feeling of this speech, as well as by the graceful frankness with which it was expressed, and he replied that though, in consequence of his having much grown, he

certainly at first did not recognise him, he quite remembered him, and should be happy to hear that his mother and sister were well. "They are quite well," answered Gerald, "they often speak of you, they will be so pleased to see you." And he named where they resided. From accepting the invitation to call, however, Mr Milner excused himself, though wishing to find an apology which might not give offence, he said his time was much occupied.

"Oh, but you cannot be always engaged," was urged with well-meant importunity by the warm-hearted, though forward boy; "mamma would be so sorry not to see you, to assure you of her recollection of your former goodness." But here he abruptly stopped, averted his eyes, and added, in a constrained tone, "But I beg pardon if I am impertinent." In his change of manner Mr Milner read the revulsion in the boy's feelings, from confidence that the pleasure of the meeting was mutual, to the painful perception that there was a barrier to their acquaintance which the other might not be inclined to surmount; it was an appeal to his generosity, and he answered, "I'll tell you what, you shall come and see me instead; come the first evening you are at leisure." And giving Gerald a card with his address, he shook hands with him, and walked on. Amid the business of the day, Mr Milner forgot this incident; but in the evening, having no engagement, he strolled in the domain after dinner, and something brought to his mind his young friend of the morning; he recalled the eagerness with which the boy had named where he lived, and his flush of mortification when his invitation was repulsed; and after a moment's hesitation, during which

prudence strongly questioned the propriety of the step, he determined by a voluntary call to dissipate the impression he had perhaps given of pride and unkindness.

The direction given him by Gerald led him through several very retired streets, to a house standing a few paces back from the road, within a wooden paling, and being almost concealed by two large willows that flourished in front, would seem to have been for that very reason selected by its present occupants. There was nothing of a garden, but the branches of a *westeria-synensis*, loaded with heavy clusters of lilac blossom, were trained round some of the windows, and a few pots of balsam stood in the veranda. Neither within nor without was there any appearance of limited means, though everything was markedly plain and simple.

The drawing-room was closed in, and lighted for the evening, and Mrs Bright, on whom years had told heavily since he last saw her, was working at one end of a table, at the other end of which her son, with several books before him, was deeply engrossed with his studies, while Margaret sat quietly sewing in a corner. On the unexpected announcement of Mr Milner, Gerald started up with an exclamation of pleasure, and by the ladies he was received as a very welcome guest; but it was not with the frank ease of an equal friendship that they met him, but as a respected benefactor; and embarrassed, rather than gratified, by such a reception, he endeavoured to set things on a more easy footing by speaking familiarly to Gerald. He looked over his books, questioned him about his studies, and soon became interested in the bent of mind the boy discovered.

During the fluent conversation that passed between them Margaret listened attentively, but took no part, far too shy and unused to strangers to volunteer any remark, unless particularly addressed ; and when at last Mr Milner turned to her, and with a smile asked whether she was as fond of reading as her brother, she blushed exceedingly, as though it was rather a pain than a pleasure to be brought into notice. But Mr Milner was not discouraged by this reserve from attempting to make her acquaintance ; he perceived that this convict's daughter had a low sweet voice which pleased him well, and a face which, he said to himself, was fit for the Virgin Mary. The difficulties in his way, therefore, rather stimulated him than otherwise ; and passing by an easy digression from the classical authors he had been discussing with Gerald to lighter works, which might be supposed to suit a young lady's taste, he spoke of poetry and poets with a discrimination and *esprit* that must have charmed any one capable of appreciating it ; but Margaret knew very little of literature, and after one or two slight rejoinders, her ingenuousness forced her to confess that her reading had been very limited, her mother had very few books, and Gerald's were mostly Greek and Latin. Mr Milner had, however, discernment to see the difference between mere want of information and want of intelligence, and he told her that he had a great many books which he thought she would like to read, if her brother would take the trouble to fetch them for her.

The acquaintance thus renewed was continued by Mr Milner from feelings of benevolence ; he made no attempt

to draw the mother and daughter from the seclusion in which they had hitherto lived, but he visited them in their quiet retirement, and while reaping in their gratitude all the reward of disinterested kindness, was unmindful that even this degree of notice of the convict's family was viewed as of very questionable propriety, by those of his acquaintance to whose knowledge it came. By Gerald he was alternately interested and provoked ; when the boy smirked at his own handsome face in the glass, and made conceited speeches, he felt inclined to box his ears, but he could sympathise in the ambition Gerald often expressed to retrieve the credit of his family, and grieved to see him becoming daily more and more spoiled through too much liberty and the predominance of such apparently trivial faults as self-conceit and love of display. The vanity which was Gerald's ruling disposition craved now for something more to feed upon than the flatteries of his vulgar associates ; visions began to float through his brain of happiness founded on fame and distinction ; he longed to achieve not only a respectable name but a position in the colony ; often he would saunter alone on the beach or among the trees of the domain, building airy castles for the future, in which he saw himself in possession of all that he coveted ; and thus he would dream away hours in that most profitless of amusements, the indulgence of imagination. How his wishes were to be attained he but very vaguely inquired, though he had shrewdness to suspect that they would not be so by the ostentatious display of wealth alone ; in Mr Milner he first saw the advantages of mental cultivation, in him he learned to consider the words

a "scholar" and a "gentleman" as in a great measure synonymous, and he determined that want of education should not be a barrier to his filling that place in society from which it would appear the crime of his father had for ever banished him. Still there was a great difference between him and Mr Milner in their real esteem of learning; Gerald was one of those, described by a French philosopher, who "buy knowledge in order to sell it again," while with Mr Milner it was the pearl of great price which he would gladly sell all that he had to purchase.

In this engrossing pursuit of the world, in one form or other, Gerald but once received a check, and then by the rather sudden death of his mother. It was not, in fact, really sudden, but he did not observe the gradual inroads of that heart-disease, which, by sure though almost imperceptible steps, carried Mrs Bright to her grave; and he was able to read the cause of his sister's increasing gravity, and his mother's increasing paleness and languor, only when summoned to attend what she assured him was, and he felt to be, her death-bed. Earnest and impressive was the conversation she held with him, when, as a dying woman standing on the brink of two worlds, she compared with awful distinctness the fleeting shadows of the one with the eternal realities of the other. With a solemnity which affected him deeply, she pointed out to her son the difficulties of that strait and narrow path, in which she trusted he would walk through life; she warned him against the temptations and snares most prevalent in our time and colony, and likely to assail his path; and lastly, she spoke of faults in his own character which required amendment.

Gerald, who had never been accustomed to anything of self-examination, was surprised to be accused of faults, and was at a loss to understand her allusion, until she proceeded to mention that pretension and desire for the world's applause which was conspicuous in all he did. "But," exclaimed Gerald, "that may be foolish, but it is not a fault." Mrs Bright took trouble to trace the connexion between faults and follies, showing him how vanity leads to artifice and deception, love of wealth to unjust means of obtaining it, and love of this world to forgetfulness of the next. "I have not much fear," were her concluding words, "that sooner or later these faults will correct themselves, for it is not fruits of this world's growth that ever for long satisfy the soul of man ; and whether it is the disappointing pursuit of fortune which ever evades his grasp, or the equally certain disappointment that must attend the fullest attainment of his purposes, by one or the other, he is made to feel what shadows he has been pursuing, and that all below is vanity ; but, Gerald, far happier they who, without any such bitter lessons of experience, give the first freshness of an untried heart to objects worthy of the strivings of an immortal being."

For Margaret, Mrs Bright entertained none of these fears, for the world offered in her case a very different prospect, but to her she gave a charge. In all the close intimacy of the mother and daughter, one subject had been sacred between them—the crime and present circumstances of the father ; but now with her latest blessing Mrs Bright coupled the injunction to do what might be in her power for his reformation, to seek him when the time of his

punishment was over, to exert herself to gain an influence over him, and after they once met, not again to lose sight of him. And Margaret promised to her dying mother, and repeated the promise before Heaven as she stood by her mother's grave; asking, as she accepted the responsibility, for grace to fulfil the mission that was hers.

Resigned, even under an affliction the greatest she had known in a world which her brief experience of sixteen years had proved to be full of suffering, Margaret could also have borne to find herself after her mother's death as desolate and neglected as she expected; but in Mr Milner, to whom she had lately looked up as a friend and adviser, she now found more, and received from him the offer of a home and protection as his wife. Few words passed between them, and those few, less the ordinary expressions of lovers, than of gentle comfort on his part and of gratitude on hers. An obstacle, however, quite unforeseen by either, arose. The only elder relation whom Margaret possessed was an uncle by her mother's side. Mr Francis was in character the counterpart of his sister—a man remarkable for no particular ability, but distinguished by an uprightness of principle, and singleness of motive, as rarely met with in this self-seeking world, as, when met with, it is delightful and refreshing. This gentleman, on hearing of the death of his sister, hastened to Sydney, and being asked for his approval of his niece's marriage, his consent was, if not actually withheld, at least most reluctantly given.

The daughter of a convict was not, he said, a fit wife for a man of Mr Milner's position, and it was hardly possible

but that, however willingly he now overlooked all objections, the day would come when he would repent ; far more secure of Margaret's comfort would he feel in the humble home he could afford her, than in that which offered by comparison so brilliant a lot. Mr Milner was piqued, and somewhat haughtily demanded whether he questioned the sincerity of his attachment, or doubted that there were qualities in his niece, which, as they had won his affection, would be equally powerful to retain it. "Circumstances alter," Mr Francis replied, "and it is difficult to realise at present all the disadvantages which would result to you from a connexion with this young woman. In time to come, the step may involve others besides yourself ; and without wishing to detract from Margaret's many excellences, or being insensible to the generosity of your views, Mr Milner, I still think they had better be laid aside."

To the real merit and sound sense of this worthy man's objections, Mr Milner, at all times confident in himself, turned a deaf ear, and without even waiting for the time when she could, with propriety, exchange her mourning for a bridal garb, he married his Margaret, and brought her to the home which he resolved, in the proud strength of his own purposes, should henceforth shield her from all those sorrows which had shed such a gloom over the earliest portion of her youth.

While Margaret was thus provided for, Gerald received from his uncle, who had hitherto acted for him, the management of his own affairs ; and owing partly to the prudence with which they had been conducted, and partly to a rise in the value of property, he found himself in pos-

session of a large independent fortune. The first use he made of this discovery was to offer to share his wealth with his sister,—an offer which Mr Milner briefly and peremptorily refused: he would not consent to partake in any degree of ill-gotten riches. Gerald next pressed on his uncle, in acknowledgment of his services, a sum far more in accordance with his own spirit of careless liberality, than with the modest requirements of Mr Francis, who kindly but firmly declined accepting any remuneration. Lastly, having put his affairs in train, Gerald formed the laudable resolution of perfecting his own education at one of the English universities; and soon after his sister's marriage he sailed for Europe.

CHAPTER III.

IN the small sitting-room of a very small house on the Surrey Hills, sat at patient needlework that pale, delicate young woman, whose intercession for her husband Mr Milner had so harshly repulsed. She looked a degree more worn than on that day, but also more cheerful; and now and then, as she unwearyingly plied her task, a quiet smile would part her lips like the outward token of some happy thought within; yet if any one who knew her circumstances had seen these gleams of sunshine on her face, he might have asked what she saw, in reflecting on her prospects, to smile about. The room she occupied was poorer and smaller than that she had been used to when her husband was receiving Mr Milner's liberal salary; her own health evidently demanded a certain degree of comfort and ease, and the garment she was patching was so very old that nothing less than the difficulty of replacing it could make any one take the trouble of repairing it. But she would have described things rather differently; she would have said how much reason she had to rejoice that her husband, instead of being out of a situation as they had feared, had, by a most happy chance, or rather, she would have termed it, the goodness of Providence, ob-

tained, with scarcely an interval of lost time, employment as clerk in one of the first mercantile houses in Sydney ; that the duties were lighter, and the remuneration better, than they had any right to expect ; and last, not least, this was Saturday afternoon, when Pryn was to bring home the first month's salary, with which she pictured the purchase for her husband of one or two articles of dress which should enable him to appear at the office on a footing with his fellow-clerks ; and this was all that shed for the time so bright an expression over the pale face of this young woman. Yet she did not allow her thoughts to interfere with her work, but continued it unremittingly all through that sultry December afternoon, when many stronger than she found the heat supportable only while reposing in perfect idleness in their large, luxurious apartments. Presently the door was opened by a slender girl of twelve or thirteen, whose only personal adornment were the long curls of bright auburn which nature bestows on so many of the colonial children. "Mamma," said she, "I have made everything tidy, and given Edward and George their dinners, and now I am ready to finish your piece of work."

"My dear," replied Mrs Pryn, "I can finish it ; but did you take some dinner yourself, Emmy ?"

"Yes, what I wanted ; I was not very hungry." As she spoke, her eye wandered through the window to a fruiterer's cart which had stopped in front of the house, and the next minute her little brother ran into the room—"Mamma, here's a man wants to know if you'll buy any fruit to-day ?"

"Tell him, not any to-day," replied Mrs Pryn.

"Oh, ma! do give us a water-melon," exclaimed the boy; "he has such fine ones, and it would be so cool and nice to-day."

"Indeed, I cannot afford to buy you a melon," was the reply; then, seeing the little urchin's look of disappointment, she added, "but I shall get some money this evening, when father comes home, and I promise you a melon on Monday; now go, there's a good boy, and learn your lessons."

"I don't think there is much good, is there, in learning our lessons, now that we never go to school?"

"I hope to be able to send you to school next week," answered Mrs Pryn, "and after that you shall attend regularly."

"But I am not sure," said the child, hesitating, "that I want to go to school while we have holes in our shoes; the other boys laugh at us, and Edward minds it as much as I do."

There was something very beautiful in the hopeful smile with which poor Mrs Pryn answered this speech. "I know, my child, that you have had many things to bear, but that time I hope and believe is past; you are too young for me to explain fully to you, but your father has got a situation which will give us enough money to live very comfortably, and I intend to buy you each some new clothes, and to let you go to school as soon as they are ready; now you may go and play, only do not go into the sun to heat yourselves." The boy left the room, as she said, to play, but the girl stayed with her mother. "You

are a good child, Emmy," said Mrs Pryn, "you never ask for anything."

"Oh, why, you know, there is such a difference between me and little George; I can understand much more than he can." She took hold as she spoke of her mother's work, and with gentle force drew it away, saying she wished to finish it; Mrs Pryn yielded, thanked her with a smile, and prepared to enjoy the rare luxury of a few minutes' repose. At liberty to revert to her own feelings, she found that she was very much tired and oppressed by the heat, and leaning back in her chair, she closed her eyes. The little girl placed herself on a stool, stitching away with right good-will, to save her mother trouble, though with very indifferent execution; and for a time there was perfect stillness in the room, save for the buzzing of flies and mosquitoes which swarmed in the close atmosphere, impregnated with heat from the burning sand-hills around. Suddenly a sharp knock at the outer door awoke Mrs Pryn with a start, and made Emily jump from her stool.

"There is your father!" exclaimed the former, "go, Emmy, and let him in."

The work was thrown down in an instant, but the knock was impatiently repeated before she had time to run to the door and give admittance to the father of the family, Mr Milner's discarded clerk.

Mr Pryn was one of those unfortunate beings whose appearance awakens at first sight feelings either of ridicule or compassion; his figure was deformed and shrunk, but his face, as is not uncommon in persons thus afflicted, gave indications of a rather superior intelligence, though dis-

figured by an expression of settled bad temper. His wife turned round with a smile of pleasure as he entered, but it vanished with the first glance at her husband's face. The man looked not to say tired, but so utterly worn-out that his wife involuntarily rose to offer him the only cushioned chair in the room, and into it he dropped as quite a matter of course, without even a remark, beyond what might be conveyed in the kind of grunt with which he kicked the cat from off the hassock at his feet.

"How tired you look, George," said Mrs Pryn, "and unhappy too."

"I am a most unfortunate man," was the reply, "a very owl of ill luck; evil pursues me at every turn."

"Dear, dear! there surely is no new misfortune?" cried Mrs Pryn. "Why do you speak so? and to-day, when we were to have been so happy, and got the month's salary."

"There it is," said he, dashing the small sum on to the table, with a violence that sent some of the shillings rolling on to the floor; "take it, and make the most of it, for it is the last you will ever get."

Mrs Pryn paused in picking up the fallen money, and stood as one thunderstruck. "Is it possible," she exclaimed, "you have given up the situation! but why, before you took such a step, did you not consider?"—

"Did I tell you I had given it up?" asked Mr Pryn, interrupting her. She understood him only too well, and turned aside in tears. "Come, come," said Mr Pryn, harshly, "no whimpering, I have enough to try my patience without that."

Mrs Pryn wiped away her tears, and her tone was very mild, though somewhat tremulous, as she observed, "I might have feared this when I saw how little you laid to heart the lesson Mr Milner gave you ; and I dare not hope that whatever situation you obtain you will long be able to keep ; you have such a proud, independent spirit, George, that you are constantly giving and taking offence ; and gentlemen will not stand, nor would it be right they should, an insolent answer from one in their employ."

"No, self-respect and independence are among the privileges of the rich," retorted Pryn, with bitterness ; "men whose vulgar dignity is all vested in their purse treat as dirt beneath their feet those whose only wealth is talent and education."

"I do not think," said Mrs Pryn, mildly, "that either Mr Graham or Mr Milner deserve such a reflection ; but," she added, "have you any situation in your eye that will give us—the children, bread ?"

"Curse situations ! no ; here am I at near forty years of age expected to work in the same office, and on the same salary, as boys of nineteen and twenty ; and worse off than any of them, for they have nothing but their dress to find, while I am eaten out of house and home by a wife and children."

"I am sure, George," observed his much-enduring wife, who looked at this moment very like a person who has had a dagger driven to her heart, "I am very sorry you feel your family such a burden ; and the little that is in our power—the boys will soon be able to do something."

"What, I should like to know ? I don't see that they are

fit for anything but to eat three meals a day and wear out clothes, nor will they be anything but encumbrances for the next seven years to come."

"They are surely great pleasures too," said the mother ; "and Emmy, if she cannot make money, at least saves it ; poor child, she does the work of the house, which otherwise we must have had a servant to perform, for my health would really not allow me to exert myself in this weather."

"I should think not," answered Mr Pryn, looking rather with contempt than compassion on the drooping form and prematurely-faded features of the partner of his adversity.

"But," resumed she, "you have not told me yet what you intend to do ; our children we must provide for by some means."

Mr Pryn leaned back in his chair, and speaking slowly and distinctly said, "I have in my head a speculation by which we shall make our fortune." These words did not produce on Mrs Pryn the effect so unexpected an announcement might be supposed to create ; on the contrary, the gloom on her countenance rather increased, and her husband taxed her with her coldness. "You must forgive me, George, but I have too much experience of the misery that results from speculation to have sanguine hopes from any you may have in view at present ; and I must confess that I anticipate nothing but the loss of whatever is sunk in it, destitution staring us in the face and utter disappointment."

"Anne, I am astonished at you ; what, pray, would your prudence suggest ? As you said just now, the family must be provided for, and you confess yourself that I am unfitted to act in the employ of another."

"With your present temper," replied Mrs Pryn, with more sincerity than she often ventured on towards her irritable, suspicious husband ; "but I would have you look in the face the cause of your failure in so many situations, and then, with your abilities and your excellent education, you could not fail of prospering ; and we might be as happy as—as I flattered myself we should be when we married."

Perhaps in the breast of this harsh-tempered man there yet was some chord of feeling which, without intending to work on his sensibility, she had touched, for his manner was much gentler as he answered her, "But you know as well as I do that there are obstacles in the way of my obtaining employment, and while I am losing time looking about for a situation the children are starving."

"No," replied Mrs Pryn, "for in that case we should be doing our duty ; seeking a livelihood by the means obviously pointed out to us ; and He who feeds the ravens"—

"Yes, yes," interrupted Mr Pryn, impatiently, "that is all very fine ; but what I want is a sound practical opinion, not quotations of Scripture texts. I am paying you the compliment, Anne, of asking your advice."

"And I don't know how I can give you better advice than to tell you to trust in Providence," said Mrs Pryn.

"Providence never yet filled my purse for me ; so there is no use trusting Him."

"Perhaps if you were to trust to Him He might help you," was the reply ; but it did not suit him to notice the remark, and again there was silence, during which Mr Pryn took out of his waistcoat pocket a folded slip of paper

containing a small sample of wool, and this he held between his eye and the light, trying the length of the staple and fineness of the grain. "What do you think of this, Anne?" said he, handing it to her.

"It seems very fine wool," said she, languidly.

"Do you see anything particular about it?" he demanded.

"No; but I am no judge of sheep's wool."

"Sheep's wool!" repeated Mr Pryn, exultingly; "this is wool, my dear, that is to bring us in a great deal of money; did you ever hear, Anne, of such a thing as vegetable wool?"

"Vegetable wool? I don't think I ever did."

"Don't think you ever did! do think what you are saying."

"Oh! I beg your pardon; no, of course I never did; my thoughts were wandering."

"I think they were; but mark me, singular as it may seem to you, this specimen is off no sheep's back, it is a vegetable production."

"You are not quizzing me, George?"

"Quizzing you! no."

"And where did you get it?" asked Mrs Pryn; "does it grow in this colony?"

"In Melbourne," was the reply. "It is the pith of a kind of reed; the gentleman who gathered this specimen showed it to me as merely a curious vegetable production, but it immediately struck me that if cultivated it might become a source of the greatest emolument, and I look upon the discovery as affording me the opening I have long been wanting. So it ever is," added Mr Pryn;

"some commonplace observer accidentally makes a discovery, which it is reserved for men of genius to turn to practical account, and reap both the advantage and the credit."

Poor Mrs Pryn was somewhat awed by the flourish of this sentence, but she was too much accustomed to dwell on the details of economy not to view the matter in a more really practical light than her husband; and she inquired, "But will there not be great expense in cultivating this wool? You will have to rent or purchase land to grow it on, and all kinds of labour is so high at present."

"In estimating the expenses of an undertaking," observed Mr Pryn, "we must compare what is laid out on it with what are likely to be the returns of profit. Supposing I borrow money at even ten per cent., I expect that, invested thus, it will bring in twenty per cent."

"Good, if it succeeds; but supposing it fails, you will have deeply involved yourself, George, and have no means of clearing your amount of debt."

"But it cannot fail," rejoined Mr Pryn, pettishly; "I tell you that if properly managed it cannot fail."

"And to whom do you intend to apply for assistance? to your sister?"

"No," was the reply; "Rubina is shrewd and sensible in her commonplace way, but she has not got the enlargement of mind requisite to appreciate new ideas," and Mr Pryn winced at the recollection of a letter he had recently received from his sister, in reply to an application he had made for a loan. "I have some thoughts," he resumed, "of applying to old Towers, and either admitting him as a

partner in the business, or getting him to advance me the requisite sum to start with."

"But, George," said his wife, timidly, "what security have you to give Mr Towers for his money?"

"My word," was the reply, "on the certain success of the undertaking."

Anybody might have been tempted to smile at the splendid tone in which this poor creature spoke; and even his wife, though she did not smile, seemed by no means assured that the security promised was a good one. She replied—

"Well, at anyrate, George, I approve of your laying your plans before Mr Towers; he is so rich and so liberal, that I have no doubt he will give you assistance in some shape."

"Oh! he is as rich as a Jew," said her husband; "and, whether from liberality or ostentation, he certainly gives away large sums."

"And when will you see him?" asked Mrs Pryn.

"This afternoon I shall walk out to Westleigh."

"Will you go alone, or take Emmy?"

"I will take Emmy; now look me out a clean shirt, and see it is well aired; and when everything is ready for me to dress, let me know."

With these directions Mrs Pryn complied; and when he returned to the parlour dressed in the very best of his poor wardrobe, his daughter hastened to tie over her curls a little worn sun-bonnet, and was ready to walk quietly after him, or offer her arm for him to lean upon, just as he wished.

CHAPTER IV.

It was a hot and dusty walk along the Newtown road, and to Mr Pryn, whose body was feeble, and mind in a fever of anxiety, a long and fatiguing one. His destination was one of the most attractive-looking of the suburban villas; and on entering the avenue the prospect offered was most refreshing, after the uninteresting tract of dry road he had traversed. There were pleasure-grounds laid out with elegance, and kept up in the most perfect order; sloping lawns, green as the meadows of England,—owing, however, their verdure to more artificial causes, as two gardeners were then engaged, the one in rolling, the other in watering. From among the foliage of some distant trees glittered, in the slanting rays of the setting sun, a row of glass-houses, for pines and such tropical plants as even in this climate require additional heat; the sea-breeze which had just sprung up wafted on every side the perfume of a variety of choice shrubs and flowers, all around wore signs of a superior taste and judiciously laid-out wealth. So far, however, from receiving pleasure from the lovely scene before him, it seemed only to awaken in Mr Pryn's mind a yet more bitter feeling of discontent, as he compared his position in life with that of the owner of this place; and the comparison was the more natural and mortifying, as twenty

years before they had been together clerks in the same office, alike possessed of nothing beyond the slender stipend their services earned, and with the difference only that Pryn, entertaining a high opinion of his own genius, had boasted of the time when he would be a rich man ; while his companion continued to fag in the employ of another. He quite forgot, as he complained of the different result of their two careers, the yet important consideration, that in the long years during which Mr Towers had worked and denied himself, he had attended to business but by fits and starts, and any little savings he effected, invested in some wild-goose speculation, which invariably ended in his losing everything.

There was a painful mixture of pride and wounded self-love in the feeling with which he prepared to make his application to his former acquaintance ; and as he stood under the veranda of the large, handsome house, and looked on the pale, exhausted face of his little daughter, the unhappy man really felt as if nearly life or death depended on his success. As he awaited a servant to whom to give his message, he caught a glimpse through the trees of a party of ladies and gentlemen, apparently amusing themselves in the garden ; he was too far off to distinguish any individual figure, but the tones of animated conversation reached his ear, with now and then a light, merry laugh from a youthful voice.

Mr Pryn felt that he was unfortunate ; if Mr Towers had company, as seemed to be the case, he would be annoyed at being disturbed ; and by applying at a *mal à propos* time he was unlikely to obtain a favourable audi-

ence. But the bell was already rung, and before he could decide on anything, a footman answered the summons.

"I want to see Mr Towers, on business," said Pryn, "but I believe he is engaged at present, so I will call again to-morrow after church, if that will suit him."

"Mr Towers, sir, never sees anybody on business on a Sunday."

"But my business is very particular. I think he will see me, so pray take my message."

With all the civility that became the servant of so excellent a master, the man withdrew, and returning in a few minutes, informed him that Mr Towers would see him then, and requested him to walk in.

Mr Pryn desired his daughter to sit down in the hall, while he was shown into the general sitting-room. It was vacant, and he took advantage of the few minutes he was alone to take a mental survey of its appearance. It was spacious and handsomely furnished, in the style most suited to a hot climate, yet united with its elegance an air of ease and comfort never visible where ostentation has prompted expenditure. Ladies' work lay about, books with marks in them; the piano stood open, littered with songs and music, and an easel in one of the windows had a drawing fixed in it, most exquisitely commenced. As the tired man took a seat in a patent easy-chair, the feelings which had been awakened in the garden gained force. "The price of that grand piano," thought he, "would set me up; one of the superfluous luxuries which this man's family enjoy would give me the means of obtaining the common comforts of life."

The voices he had heard in the garden now drew near, and Mr Pryn looked eagerly through the window; there were persons of various ages, from the father of the family down to boys in round jackets, and little girls. But his attention was diverted from all the others, from the figure even of Mr Towers himself, to that of a young man who, at the moment his eye fell upon him, had paused to hold down the bough of an oleander for the accommodation of a young lady who was selecting sprays to add to a basketful of flowers on her arm. "Why, I declare," muttered Mr Pryn, "if there is not Charles Lancefield!" And he was pleased at the sight; his confidence in his own probable success rose, for he was slightly acquainted with Mr Lancefield, and well knew him to be nearly as poor as himself; and if Mr Towers patronised one person who had nothing, he would probably do as much for another. "And Lancefield is clever, too," thought he; "how well he spoke at the School of Arts the other night; oh, yes, Towers likes ability." Coming to this conclusion, he addressed that gentleman, who now entered, with less scruple than he would have done, had he not met with this little stimulant to his hopes. As in every arrangement, both in the grounds and about the house of Westleigh, were conspicuous proofs of a cultivated taste, one might naturally expect to find some similar polish and refinement in the projector of so many improvements; but there was very little indication of either in the appearance of Mr Towers. He was about the middle height, but looked somewhat shorter from the ungraceful squareness of his figure; his gray hair was short and wiry; his complexion deeply furrowed. Had it

not been for the intelligence of the gray eyes, which, clear and bright, looked from beneath the shaggy brows, and the expression of benevolence about the mouth, his appearance would have been repulsive ; as it was, it was unprepossessing, and not set off to the best advantage by a common cabbage-tree hat and tweed coat, decorated with large horn buttons, which composed a dress certainly not usually worn in the vicinity of Sydney.

As this gentleman entered, there was a struggle in Mr Pryn's mind between self-interest and that pride which was a leading trait of his character ; the former, however, gained the mastery for the hour, and he bowed low and respectfully.

"We do not meet as strangers, I hope," said Mr Towers, advancing and offering his hand : "time was when we saw a great deal of each other, although we have not met of late years."

"Our different roads in life have carried us very far apart," said Pryn, in a rather agitated voice.

"It was only at the starting-point we were together, eh ? but sit down, however," for Pryn had continued standing.

The latter formally complied, observing as he did so, "I must apologise for intruding upon you, for I believe you are engaged with company."

"No, only my own young people, and one or two intimate friends who generally spend Saturday afternoon with me."

"If then you are at leisure, perhaps you will spare a few minutes, and give me your opinion on a little matter which I have in hand."

"Willingly, to the best of my ability, though I cannot promise to give my opinion immediately, as if it is a subject of importance, it may require consideration."

"No, sir, I think it will not require consideration—you will either meet my views or not. I have a great esteem, Towers, for you, and I am willing to give you the preference over many others who have equal claims in the advantages of a very desirable speculation."

"That is a subject that probably will require consideration, Mr Pryn; it has never been my way to invest money rashly, and since I have been the father of a large family I have become more cautious"——

"Oh! if you are no longer the enterprising man you have the repute of being," cried Pryn, thrown off his guard by, as usual, letting his temper get the better of him; but Mr Towers took no notice of the interruption, and concluded his sentence as he had intended—"Still, I hope I am not blind to what offers a real advantage; and when my judgment approves, I am willing to risk something, although I am not sure that you and I will agree as to what is a desirable speculation."

"Stop a minute, sir, stop a minute; you cannot possibly judge till you hear the nature of what I am about to propose."

"That is undoubtedly true; I beg your pardon; proceed, if you please."

Mr Pryn answered by drawing from his pocket-book the sample of vegetable wool, and presenting it to Mr Towers for inspection. That gentleman viewed it with all the interest the other could desire, and asked many ques-

tions as to where it had been found, and the nature of its growth.

"I do not know," continued Mr Pryn, when he had imparted all he knew respecting it, "in what quantity it is to be found at present, but no doubt it may be grown to any extent; it possesses all the requisites for the manufacture of wool, and a few hundreds invested in cultivating and bringing it to perfection, cannot fail of realising an enormous profit to those who have a monopoly of the first that is brought to market."

"But, my dear sir," exclaimed Mr Towers, "what is the use of cultivating a vegetable production to take the place of wool in a country that is so peculiarly adapted to produce that article of a very superior quality?"

"Why, Mr Towers, a man of your sense and discernment must surely see the many advantages it unites in not being subject to the vicissitudes which affect an animal production; flocks are lost through the carelessness of shepherds, you are unlucky at your lambing season, a bad season causes a scarcity of both food and water, catarrh gets among your sheep and chinks them off by hundreds."

"And is a vegetable production affected by no vicissitudes of season?" asked Mr Towers, quietly; "nor by blight, nor by the carelessness of the labourers employed on the plantation?"

Mr Pryn had an answer ready against this argument, but Mr Towers was now engaged fixing a magnifying glass upon its stand, and by the help of this he proceeded to inspect the specimen more minutely than he had yet done.

"The question is, will it *felt*," said he, turning from the

window ; " I have doubts ; if you look at it through this glass you will see that it differs from wool."

" Oh ! I am perfectly aware of the difference, but that I look upon as an advantage ; the same objection might have been urged against silk, that it was not the same as linen ; the great thing in the present day is to produce something new ; we shall have the pleasure of giving to the world an elegant fabric, between silk and wool, one which has all the gloss and beauty of silk, with the warmth and flexibility of wool. I cannot help smiling," he added, rubbing his hands together, " as I picture the consternation of the wool-growers when they find some day their market anticipated by a colonial produce which must for ever lower the value of their own."

All this was poured forth with a fluency that might have overwhelmed many an auditor, but it did not for an instant bewilder Mr Towers, who replied with a smile, " Those are very golden visions, but do they not a little put you in mind of an old fable ? "

" Oh ! if you are going to turn the thing into ridicule," returned Pryn, reddening, " I shall wish you good morning."

" Seriously, then," resumed Mr Towers, " from what do you judge it has all these capabilities ? have you seen the result of an attempt to manufacture it ? "

" No, I have never seen it manufactured ; the experiment has not yet been tried ; but I judge from those qualities which eminently adapt it to be converted into cloth."

" Well, it does not appear to me that it is so," observed Mr Towers.

“ I am to understand, then,” said the other, “ that you are decided to have nothing to do with the experiment ? ”

“ Decided,” was the brief reply.

“ Enough, enough, then ; I only thought it right to give you the first offer ; you are a rich man, and it is of little consequence whether or not you profit by the advantages of this opening, but with me the case is different.”

Now Pryn had come to what, after all, was the main point of the visit, to solicit immediate assistance in the shape of a loan ; and rendered more nervous by his failure hitherto, he resumed the conversation, which flagged after Mr Towers’s last reply.

“ You spoke truly when you remarked just now, Mr Towers, that our paths in life have been different ; your progress, from our common starting-point, has been attended by prosperity and success ; and I meet you now, after an interval of many years, in possession of station, wealth, and happiness : I, on the other hand, have been unfortunate ; I have not at this moment money at command to benefit by an advantageous opening, but, looking forward to certain profits, it will suit me to borrow at a high interest. Will it suit you to advance me a sum sufficient for my views ? ”

“ To invest in this experiment ? ” asked Mr Towers.

Pryn would have preferred not answering this question, but there was no evading Mr Towers’s straightforward determination to know what he was about, and he replied that this was the use for which he designed it.

“ It will not be convenient. I mean,” he added, from his strict regard to truth, which did not allow him to express a thing in any way that admitted of a misconception,

"that I decline advancing you a sum to speculate with in any way ; and if I recommend you to relinquish thoughts of making your fortune by any sudden stroke, and to trust in preference to your own persevering industry, you will not attribute it to selfish motives, as years ago, when we were boys in the same office, I said the same thing. It is strange, Pryn, how little either of us have changed since then."

But this reference to advice, which, at the time, had been despised and slighted, only served to irritate Pryn, and to dissipate the little self-command he had remaining ; and with a countenance working with ill-suppressed passion, he broke forth, "How unjustly is fortune distributed in this world ! What avails it that I am possessed of no mean abilities, or of energy to use them, when Heaven has with them sent a curse, which dooms me in whatever I attempt to fail ; while others, whose common minds fit them for only plodding industry, succeed in whatever they undertake !"

"We have no warrant for supposing," observed Mr Towers, gravely, "that even our best endeavours will always be rewarded with success ; 'the lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.'"

"Excuse me, sir," said Mr Pryn, impatiently, "but I must say that I consider such language extremely unprofessional."

Though the personal sarcasm of this rejoinder rendered it doubly offensive, there was nothing but pain and regret in the tone of Mr Towers's reply.

"I am sorry that a few words of religion, in which I

have often found great comfort, should be unbefitting any profession ; but letting that pass, can you say that you have always pursued the means which, humanly speaking, are most likely to insure success?"

"It is very easy, Mr Towers, for a man, in the pride of his own achievements, to find fault with the means another has pursued ; besides which, you set out with advantages which I had not."

"There you must allow me to differ from you ; the advantages were on your own side, sir ; as a *gentleman* by birth and education, you surely had advantages over the farmer's son who, beyond the first rudiments of knowledge, had everything to acquire for himself."

"A farmer's son !" repeated Mr Pryn, incredulously.

Mr Towers smiled at what he could not but suspect to be an affectation of ignorance, but replied very good-humouredly, "My father was a Yorkshire farmer, and a very small farmer he was. The imperfect groundwork of education, which was all I for many years received, was imparted to me at the parish school ; and when I came to Australia, I brought with me nothing but resolution and energy, and a humble confidence in my own powers."

"And can you put me in possession," asked Mr Pryn, all on the *qui vive* for some hint which, as surely as the golden key in fairy tales, should disclose to him the secret of his neighbour's wealth ; "can you tell me any of the means by which you have grown so rich ?"

"I have very little to tell," was the simple rejoinder ; "one thing was, that, having adopted a profession, I did not allow myself to chop and change, even when luck seemed

against me; I never speculated rashly; and for many years I never spent more than sixpence in the shilling."

"Still," suggested Mr Pryn, "with all prudence and the longest experience, mercantile prosperity is precarious; and it yet may be your lot to suffer a reverse."

"It may, undoubtedly; and while untried, I shall not boast of how I should act under it; but I have been hitherto prosperous, and though I have many claims upon me, I would endeavour, did I see you likely to profit by it, to give you a start in business; but the enthusiasm with which you have taken up this scheme, proves to me that you have not corrected that spirit of wild speculation which grounded so many of our differences in early life, and any money advanced to you now would be but a temporary benefit. If you apply for a time steadily to the duties of your situation"—

"I have at present no situation," observed Pryn, stiffly.

"I was aware you had left Mr Milner, but I thought you had employment with Graham & Co."

"I had, for one month only."

"And will it be an impertinent question if I ask why you left that situation?"

"Because," answered Mr Pryn, shrugging his shoulders, "I did not put up with his reproof for some trifling want of punctuality with the abject servility he required—much the same reason as I left Mr Milner's."

"Without the punctuality you esteem so lightly, however," observed Mr Towers, "neither of those gentlemen would have attained the affluence they at present enjoy. Mr Pryn, you possess education, activity of mind, and the capability of theorising well; but it is not that kind of

ability that will ever make a rising man in Australia. It sounds perhaps paradoxical to say, that after so long a residence in the colony, you yet want 'colonial experience;' but in fact you want it as much as when, a mere lad, you found the want of it thrown in your teeth at every turn. Before you can enter with profit to yourself into any business, your views must undergo a very material change; and any one who wishes you well, would act with very false kindness in giving you the means of temporarily carrying out your present wishes, and so postponing the day when you may see things in a practical light. If you will take my advice—and from your appealing to me, I think you will probably attach to it some weight—you will look out for another situation."

"I do not happen to be acquainted with any merchant at present who has one to give me."

"I will give you," said Mr Towers, "a situation which will maintain your family in respectability; and to show you that I think well of your ability, and ill only of your judgment, I promise that, if at the end of six months I am satisfied with your discharge of your duty, I will promote you to one of greater trust and renumeration. Let your attendance at my office commence on Monday, and in the hope that you will prove steady, I will advance your first quarter's salary for your immediate necessities."

"I thank you kindly, sir," replied Mr Pryn, in a tone which had in it very little of either kindness or gratitude, "but that would not suit my present views; liberality of sentiment and independence of character are not the best qualities for a clerk in a merchant's office."

CHAPTER V.

WHILE the two gentlemen were engaged in this conversation, little Emily sat patiently awaiting her father, until one of the glass doors of the veranda opened and a young lady crossed the hall, carrying a large basket of flowers. She looked at the child, not sure from her dress what to take her for, and asked if she was waiting to see any one on business.

Emily started out of a half-sad reverie as the somewhat abrupt though pleasant-toned voice addressed her, and timidly raising her eyes to the face of the tall girl who had paused in front of her, answered, "My papa, ma'am, is with Mr Towers now." The lady-like accent and sweet pale face, in which the grave, subdued expression was very inconsistent with the usually joyous spirits of childhood, fixed Miss Towers's attention, and resting her basket on a stand, she inquired, "What is your name?"

"Emily Pryn, ma'am."

"You look very tired," pursued Miss Towers; "have you been walking far?"

"We walked from the Surrey hills; but I am rested now, thank you."

"That is a long way this hot afternoon; come with me, and I will give you some fruit to refresh you."

Thus invited, Emily followed the lady into the veranda, where her childish admiration was awakened by the collection of birds and flowers. In passing a corner wired off as an aviary, and appropriated to bidgegigars and other small birds, she involuntarily lingered, till suddenly her face changed, and she shrank behind her conductress. The gay group of Miss Towers's young companions were approaching the steps of the other end, and the little girl glanced in painful embarrassment, first at them, and then at her own dust-covered shoes and soiled dress. "The nasty red dust," said she, timidly, "has spoiled my frock."

"I was very inconsiderate," exclaimed Miss Towers, hastily, "to ask you to come into the garden after you have just had so long a walk. Of course you will prefer to rest; in this room we shall find some fruit."

The dining-room into which she drew her was large and cool; on the walls were a good many pictures, some of them highly prized by Mr Towers as among the very few really fine paintings to be found in the colony; others executed by Miss Towers herself, and by no means unworthy a place beside the works of professional artists. With an intuitive, though as yet utterly uncultivated taste for art, Emily's eyes were immediately fixed on these; with but a passing attention, however, for Miss Towers drew a chair for her to the table, and placed before her a dish of fine peaches and grapes. How tempting they looked, as Emily's now bright eyes confessed, gathered in the dew of the early morning, and lying so cool and fresh, half hidden by vine leaves! Miss Towers sat down by her; and to place her at her ease, asked some questions respect-

ing her home and occupations. While on the one hand was the unaffected tone of real interest, and on the other far too much simplicity to wish even to keep back truths which might bring upon her the contempt of the rich and prosperous, the state of destitution in which this family was plunged very soon became evident. Miss Towers sat thoughtfully silent for some minutes; perhaps she, as well as Mr Pryn, was reflecting on the different destinies in this world. At last rising, she walked to a table upon which her desk stood at the other end of the room; and as she stood unobserved by Emily, counted how much she had left of her quarter's allowance. "It is only," she thought, "doing without a new dress for the next government-house ball," and she drew from her purse the five-pound note which had been appropriated to that purpose.

"I am sorry," said she, returning to Emily, "that you got your frock spoiled in your walk here; but you must believe that I feel towards you as a friend, and let me give you a little present to buy another. If there is more than enough, you can do what you like with the rest."

Tears filled the child's eyes, if perhaps from something of wounded delicacy, far more from the overflowings of gratitude and surprise. She had just placed the note in her bag when her father's head was thrust in at the half-open door, and his sharp voice said impatiently—

"Come, Emmy, I am going home." He saw that a young lady was speaking to his daughter, but made no apology for interrupting the conversation, and merely said, with a careless bow, "Miss Towers, I presume? Good evening, Miss."

"You have not had time," observed Miss Towers, "to finish your grapes; you had better take these with you."

But as she placed a large bunch in her hand, Mr Pryn darted into the room, and snatching them away, flung them back on to the table.

"She did not come here as a beggar; she wants none of your grapes."

The anger which, in the presence of Mr Towers, he had been compelled to restrain, now vented itself on this unoffending girl. For an instant a rising feeling of indignation flushed Lydia Towers's cheek; but when she turned her eye on the feeble form of the offender, whose deformity laid him open to remark wherever he appeared, and who, by his own ungoverned passions, was rendered yet more unhappy than he need have been, her emotion of displeasure changed to one very different, of charity and compassion; and with a civil bow to him, she offered her hand to Emily, who, as if to ask pardon for her father's rudeness, raised it to her lips. Pryn's eyes flashed fire at the sight, and seizing his daughter's arm he dragged her away.

They had left the house about half an hour, but both were so tired, they had not gone far, when quick footsteps were heard behind, and Mr Lancefield overtook them. A good evening was exchanged, and he was passing on, when Mr Pryn called after him. The sight of this young man suggested a new idea; it flashed through his scheming brain, that though Mr Towers had refused to promote *his* speculations, he might act very differently towards a personal friend. A partnership with Charles Lancefield would not in itself confer any advantage, but it might, prob-

ably would, be the key to Mr Towers' support ; so in answer to the slight salutation of the other, he inquired, " Why walking so fast ? are you in a great hurry to get home ? "

" Not particularly," rejoined the youth.

" Then let us join company, that is, if you can accommodate yourself to our pace ; I must walk slow on account of my little companion."

Mr Lancefield hesitated ; but Emily's tired face decided him, and he offered her the assistance of his arm. Pryn felt curious to know whether Mr Towers had mentioned the application he had made, and his first question was to sound on this point.

" You have just taken leave of Mr Towers, I suppose."

" No," was the reply, " Mr Towers was called away from the garden by a message, from yourself, perhaps, and I did not see him again to take leave."

" That is an unceremonious way to quit a man's house," observed Mr Pryn.

" Not improperly so, I hope ; I would not willingly fail in respect to so good a friend as Mr Towers."

" A friend in need, eh ? has helped you out of some little difficulties ? "

The pride of a poor and fallen family sent the blood to Charles's face. " That is a strange remark, Mr Pryn," he answered ; " yet as you have made it, I will say that I am under no pecuniary obligation to Mr Towers, although I am his debtor for much, very much, undeserved kindness."

" And I suppose," said the other, " you would scorn to be indebted for any more substantial favours ? "

"I can never be otherwise than grateful for kind intentions," replied Charles, "whether or not I may choose to accept them."

This was not a very auspicious commencement, but it constantly was Pryn's fate to grate on the feelings of others by some ill-advised or inconsiderate remark. He hastened, however, to pass away from the subject of offence; and as it was not his way to go straight towards any object he had in view, a desultory conversation ensued. Previous to this meeting, Charles Lancefield's thoughts had been not unprofitably employed; he had been thinking over portions of Mr Towers's improving conversation, and matters connected with his own business in the coming week; and though, to any one who had seen him in the earlier part of that afternoon, while helping to fill Lydia Towers's basket with flowers, or romping with her school-boy brothers, such grave reflections might have appeared out of character with the holiday spirit of the day, such, nevertheless, was invariably the effect of a visit to Westleigh, which, so far from disposing him to indolence and discontent at the privations of his own home, braced his mind to increased energy, just as the country air invigorated his health, after a week's confinement in Sydney. But Mr Pryn, with the instinctive perception which often is the gift of a selfish, designing mind, was sufficiently acquainted with the bent of his young companion's character, to be aware that there were subjects more congenial to his taste than the necessary, and often irksome, details of his profession. There was the wide field of literature and scientific improvement,—questions too of ancient and

modern art, on which it was all the more delightful to exchange opinions, because they did not often come within his range. Pryn was a man of brilliant conversational powers; and although the little that had been seen of him must far from convey the impression of that superiority, in any respect, to which he laid claim, he did really possess many natural talents and a finished education. If all this was valueless in him, inasmuch as it had failed to promote in any degree his success in life, to secure the affection of others, or his own happiness, it was only because something still was wanting, and that principle, to give a just balance to the rest. Charles Lancefield had candour to admit the disadvantages in his own case of an experience limited to this colony; and he listened with respect, unmingled with envy or prejudice, to one who had enjoyed opportunities of seeing more of the world; and when he heard quotations from his favourite authors, and allusions to places unknown to him, yet familiar by name as household words, the conversation became attractive to him in the highest degree. Once or twice his brow clouded as some hard or worldly sentiment grated on his ear; but in the hurry of exercise and discussion there was no pause allowed him to weigh what was said, and to detect the sophistry which was concealed by plausible argument. Long before the subject was exhausted, at a moment, indeed, of most critical interest, they reached the spot where their roads no longer lay together.

“We must keep the question open for future discussion,” observed Pryn, who read with satisfaction the half-expressed regret in his companion’s face; “were my house

rather more commodious, I would ask you to come home with me and spend the evening."

"If that is all, and you have a little time to spare," said Charles, "will you come to my rooms for an hour?"

Pryn affected to hesitate, then accepted the invitation, and desired Emily to return home alone.

As they crossed the lower half of the race-course, where rows of stunted oaks may perhaps afford a shade to future generations of colonists, they came upon two youths who were lounging on one of the benches. One, an untidily dressed, though fair and graceful boy of about fifteen, started from his lolling attitude, and hastily pulled a cigar out of his mouth.

Mr Lancefield touched him on the shoulder, and drew him a little aside. "Idling out here with that fellow, Henry, after you promised to me," said he, in a tone of grave, though gentle reproof.

An expression of impatience clouded the boy's face as he fidgeted with his hands behind him to conceal the cigar.

"You hardly deserve Mr Towers's kindness," pursued the other; "but he empowered me to say that if you get well through the examination on Monday, he will ask you to spend the vacation at Westleigh."

"Oh that will be jolly!" exclaimed the boy; "I can knock down oranges all day."

"But, remember, there is a condition, so you had better come in now and see what you have to do in preparation." And waiting a moment to see that he was obeyed, Charles rejoined Mr Pryn.

"Your brother is a bit of a scamp, Mr Lancefield," observed the latter; "hardly so steady as you are."

"My brother has not had the advantages which I had at his age," replied Charles, in a reserved tone, "though I should like to see him stick more to his books."

"He may be picking up knowledge, however," observed Mr Pryn, "though not in the way you would choose; ay! and knowledge that is likely to be of as much service to him through life as scholarship. It is not the bookworms who make their way in the world; every day, unfortunately, proves the truth of the saying, that a little education goes a long way in the colony."

These last words—unworthy a man who did own education and scholarship—were spoken within Henry Lancefield's hearing; and his brother felt annoyed, for such a sentence, as he well knew, was precisely one to be caught up and remembered by an idle boy. Good advice would probably have passed unheeded; whereas, many a day after this, Charles was doomed to hear Mr Pryn's remark, that a little education goes a long way in a colony.

They had now reached the lodgings, which were such as suited a bachelor in very limited circumstances, and Mr Lancefield ushered his guest up the steep staircase into the apartment which served as sitting-room for himself and his brother.

Mr Pryn glanced round with considerable curiosity; the furniture was scanty, and of the homeliest description, but the rough shelves which extended round three sides of the room were filled with a choice collection of books, many of them in rich though faded bindings. There the ancient

classical authors stood side by side with modern standard works in many different languages; on one shelf, and treated apparently with less respect, lay a heap of law books. Mr Pryn spent some minutes before this book-case, then turned to examine the only other ornament the room boasted—a large picture which hung over the mantel-piece. The subject represented was a stately English mansion, surrounded by noble wood—the ancestral home, it appeared to be, of some rich and time-honoured family; but hanging in that mean apartment, surmounted by its tarnished gilt frame, it seemed to bear testimony to the passing away of earthly greatness. Mr Pryn looked at it attentively, with an expression half interested, half supercilious; then as his eye fell on the fair patrician features of the two young men, from whose peculiar refinement of appearance, not even Charles's thread-bare coat, nor the slovenly dress of his brother, could detract, he read a repetition of the same story; they and the picture were alike out of place in present circumstances. "A good painting," observed Mr Pryn, "and a fine place." Charles simply assented.

"A place in which you take an interest? belongs to some connexion of your family?" added the other, at a venture.

"It did belong to my father," was the reply; "it now has passed out of the family."

"Yet, if I mistake not, you would feel more at home there, than here? To tell you the truth, you look out of place in this shabby lodging."

"We can never be out of place in any situation which Providence sees fit for us," answered Charles.

"Good doctrine," said Pryn, "but one that must be adopted with reservation, as it is apt to lead to inaction; we should always bear in mind that Providence places us in trying situations, in order that we may exert ourselves."

"I must exert myself," rejoined Charles, "to obtain a livelihood."

"You are reading for the law, I think," observed Pryn. "I should not have guessed this to be the room of a young lawyer; these," he added, touching some thick volumes on which the print of his finger remained in dust, "are clearly less your companions than those."

"I do read law," said Charles, looking slightly annoyed; "but I suppose you do not object to a man recreating himself with general literature when the business of the day is over?"

"I object to nothing that is for a man's happiness," replied Pryn, shrugging his shoulders; "but were I in your position, all my ambition would be to make money for one object."

"For what object?"

"To redeem the inheritance of my fathers," was the reply.

A sympathetic spark of enthusiasm for an instant shone in Charles Lancefield's eye. "I did once indulge such ambition," said he, "before I knew the world," and he checked a sigh.

"Are you sure you do know the world?" asked Pryn.

"But," the other continued, not noticing the interruption, "the truth is, I have no prospect whatever in my profession, and all I expect from it is bread to eat, and the means, I trust, of completing my brother's education."

"Then cut the law," said Pryn, "if it is such a bad look out, and take to something that is less up-hill work; in this colony there are no want of openings by which a young man may make money."

Charles was silent, and Mr Pryn went on to recount instances of persons who had come to Australia with next to nothing, and who, they both knew, had succeeded in accumulating large fortunes. "You and I might even enter into a partnership," continued he, "and our capital to set out with will be our joint brains!"

Till late that night, Mr Pryn sat with his new victim, opening up schemes from which they were both to reap a literally golden harvest. In the false arguments and liberal assurances of certain success with which he endeavoured to lead astray the judgment of this inexperienced young man, there was less art than any stranger hearing him might suppose; for, exerting his utmost to convince another, he himself warmed with his subject, and represented it under the glowing colours in which it really appeared to his own too sanguine imagination.

Charles Lancefield was a deeply-attentive auditor. All his slumbering ambition was on the one hand revived, while on the other the plodding industry, by which he at present obtained merely a scanty maintenance, appeared more unbearable than ever. A conflict was raised in his mind; and so brilliant was the prospect held out, that the attention even of Henry was captivated; and, forgetful of the book to which, in consideration of the promised holiday at Westleigh, he had settled down, he sat with his

eyes fixed on Mr Pryn's face, eagerly drinking in every word he said.

"O Charles!" he exclaimed at last, "why don't you accept Mr Pryn's offer at once? Have you no wish to be done with this weary drudgery?"

"Perhaps only too much, Henry," replied his brother, thoughtfully. "I cannot," he continued, turning again to Mr Pryn, "give you at present anything like a promise; I wish to think the matter over, and to consult my friend Mr Towers; but if he does not disapprove, I think I shall cut the law."

"I cannot commend your idea of consulting Mr Towers," observed Mr Pryn, rather bitterly; "he is hardly a man to approve of anything out of the beaten track."

"He has known how to manage pretty well for himself," answered Charles, significantly, "so I am inclined to think his advice will be good; but if you think it worth while to keep this an open question, we can do so, and we yet may enter into a partnership together."

CHAPTER. VI.

ABOUT three weeks after these incidents, Margaret happened to take her morning walk, in which she usually accompanied her children and their nurse, towards the Surrey Hills. They crossed a street formed of those small meagre houses which now almost cover that part, but then were only beginning to spring up. One of these was occupied by Mr Pryn, and at the moment she approached Mrs Milner observed a plainly-dressed, homely-looking woman come out. On her arm the stranger carried a basket, of a size which evidently designed it for use, and for a moment she paused, leaning against one of the posts of the veranda, as though to recover after some painful effort. As Margaret passed she looked up, and after a moment's seeming hesitation, stepped forward and accosted her.

“Mrs Milner, I believe?”

Margaret curtsied, and blushed deeply, so unused was she to be addressed by any female.

“I take the liberty of detaining you,” pursued the stranger, “in the name of a mutual acquaintance, a very great sufferer, who has just expressed a wish to see you. My own name is Towers—Mrs Towers of Westleigh.”

At these words Margaret looked on the face before her with awakened interest, for the name of Towers of West-

leigh was one which from childhood she had been accustomed to hear, and, hearing, to honour; not because she saw it frequently at the head of subscription-lists for munificent sums to public charities and the institutions of art and science, but rather that in obscure dwellings, stricken by misery and disease, she had heard it blessed by the destitute and the sick, the widow and the orphan. "You speak," said she, as she now willingly paused, "of Mrs Pryn; is she unwell, or are the family in embarrassed circumstances?"

"Both," was the reply. "Happily, in this country, where provisions are so cheap, cases of destitution are rare, but I fear there have been times when Mrs Pryn could scarcely command the price of a few pounds of meat, or a loaf of bread."

"But," exclaimed Margaret, "can you explain to me how this has happened? has Mr Pryn no employment?"

"He is employed in writing for a radical paper called the *People's Advocate*; his articles are, I am told, of a very seditious tendency—shameful articles, in fact; and the uncertain payment he receives for these are all the family have for support. It was only very lately," added Mrs Towers, "that my eldest daughter, happening to call to see his little girl, to whom Lydia had taken a great fancy, we knew to what a condition they were reduced."

"I am truly sorry," observed Margaret, "that we knew nothing of all this. My husband would, I am sure, have given them every assistance."

"It is not very easy to assist them," rejoined Mrs Towers; "anything, at least, that we could offer, Mr Pryn most

insolently refused ; his poor wife, however, looked so ill that I requested our own medical man to see her, and to-day I was present while he made the painful disclosure that her disease is hopeless."

"Surely," exclaimed Margaret, who was more and more shocked, "it is very sudden."

"No, my dear lady, it is the result of very long trial, and I might almost add ill usage on the part of her husband ; a case as clearly of death from these causes as any which startle and horrify us when we read the account in the newspapers. If we do not say that her life has been fairly sacrificed by her husband, it is only because we know that in the hands of God alone are the issues of life and death." The lady as she ceased speaking betrayed much emotion, and paused to compose herself, when Margaret said, "And do you think I can do any good by calling on her?"

"Yes," said Mrs Towers, "it is for that reason I trouble you ; I have been all but turned out of the house by Mr Pryn, so any further visits from me would only irritate him ; but his poor wife was much overcome by the doctor's opinion of her case, and she sadly needs religious comfort."

"Which though not in my power to give as efficiently as you could do," replied Margaret, speaking in the sincerity of her humility, and far from words of commonplace compliment, "I will to the best of my ability ; and I thank you for informing me how I may be of use."

These women understood each other, and though they had never met before, they now parted with the cordiality almost of friends ; for dissimilar as in many respects were their outward circumstances, they were united by a bond

of sympathy and feeling in common to which no difference of worldly position could be a barrier. Purified and softened by suffering, Margaret had learned by experience to feel for others, while the same lesson had been learned under very different teaching by Mrs Towers ; who, in a lot as unclouded as any in humanity, found in every blessing that surrounded her one additional motive and stimulant to assist the less favoured portion of her fellow-creatures. Margaret, a meek example of patience and resignation, entered the abode of trouble, to impart some of that comfort with which she herself had been comforted of God ; while Mrs Towers, having done all that was in her power, returned to her own beautiful and luxurious home, rich in all that is accounted prosperity, and richer still in the practical goodness which, while enjoying with a thankful heart the good things of the present life, laid up treasure in heaven by the daily exercise of the charity which shall never fail.

The house which Mr Pryn occupied consisted of but four rooms, two in each story. The front apartment on the ground floor opened immediately off the road, so that on crossing the threshold Margaret found herself at once in the midst of the family.

Mr Pryn sat at a table writing, Emily was rinsing out some articles of clothing in a wash-tub in one corner, and the little boys were eating each a bun which they had received out of Mrs Towers's basket. At sight of Margaret, who was forced to announce herself, the father rose, but without any attempt at civility, waited until she should state the object of her call.

"I am very sorry to hear," she began simply, "that Mrs Pryn is extremely unwell, and if it would be any pleasure to her to see me, I shall be happy to sit with her a little while."

"We are very sensible, Mrs Milner, of all that we owe to your husband," replied Mr Pryn; "and it cannot fail of giving my wife much pleasure to see any member of Mr Milner's family."

Poor Margaret was so little versed in sarcasm that she did not at once comprehend whether this was spoken in irony or in good faith; a moment, however, removed her doubt, and her timid nature almost quailed before the bitter spirit he evinced; but determined to make an effort to see Mrs Pryn, she observed, "I come here, Mr Pryn, with the simple wish of serving you; I hope you will allow me to see Mrs Pryn."

"There can be no occasion at all for your taking the trouble," was the reply; "Mrs Pryn happens to be confined to her bed to-day, a mere temporary indisposition, nothing of any consequence."

He edged nearer to the door that led to his wife's apartment, and set his back against it; but just then, when the point must otherwise have been given up, a note was brought to him from the office of the newspaper for which he wrote, and he accompanied the messenger from the house.

The coast being thus clear, Margaret asked Emily if she thought her mother would like to see her, and the little girl answering in the affirmative, showed her up-stairs. Mrs Pryn was lying on her bed, her face turned to the

wall, sobbing grievously. Margaret approached, took the wasted hand which lay outside the coverlet, and whispered words of soothing kindness and sympathy. Mrs Pryn turned towards her, and struggled to regain composure. "I am ashamed that you should see me thus, Mrs Milner," said she; "but I have this day heard my death sentence, and I am sure that you will feel for me, and pity me."

"Feel for you, dear Mrs Pryn, I do indeed," replied Margaret, "for even to the best prepared, death is a solemn and awful change; but far from pitying, I could rather envy you."

"Envy me!" repeated Mrs Pryn, in astonishment; "you envy me, who are about to be cut off almost in youth from a world which is so beautiful and pleasant!"

"In this world," answered Margaret, "are many trials, and in heaven there will be none."

It was curious to note the different sentiments of these two young women; the one who had certainly few inducements to make her cling to this earth, regretted to leave it; while the other, who had apparently many, spoke of early death as a blessing, rather than the contrary. Something of this kind perhaps struck Mrs Pryn, for she observed, "I have heard life called a 'vale of tears,' and it would be no wonder if to me it appeared so; but you, Mrs Milner, prosperous, rich, and beloved, I should not have expected to hear you speak so sadly."

A grave smile, blending much of sweetness and of melancholy, crossed Margaret's face. "There are blessed alleviations," said she, "of the troubles which sin has brought into this world; and I trust I am not ungrateful,

but did I not believe that there is in store for me a rest greater than any this world can bestow, it would be, I assure you, with a very sinking heart that I should perform my appointed part. But," Mrs Milner added, "I came not to speak of my own circumstances, but to comfort you in yours; let me read you a few verses of a psalm."

She took up a Bible which was lying on the window seat, and turned to an appropriate portion; and Mrs Pryn, who, half an hour before, had been racked by regrets and fears in which she had none to sympathise, felt soothed and encouraged, until at length her mind being composed, her body yielded to its weariness, and she dropped asleep. Margaret would now have retired, but on a slight movement she made, the poor invalid half opened her eyes, and feebly grasping her hand, murmured, "Don't leave me." She therefore retained her seat by the bed, and there, so quiet was everything around, she fell into a train of deep reflection, which gradually wandered away from the scene before her to a subject never for long absent from her thoughts. She reflected that there is a death more awful than that of the body, even the state of a soul dead in trespasses and sins; and a prayer rose to her lips that the Word, which in one case was a gospel of peace, might in another (in which she was yet more interested) have power to rouse a sinner, and drive him, ere it was too late, so to knock at the door of mercy that it might be opened to him. As these thoughts took possession of her mind, Margaret's before calm face grew troubled; she bent her head on the edge of the couch, and, with her hands

clasped in the attitude of prayer, tears, first one by one, then in a flood, forced themselves from her eyes ; not such tears as are caused by, and relieve, a transient grief, but such as in a moment of weakness may be wrung from feelings usually painfully restrained. There were none whom she feared seeing her in that quiet room, none to be grieved by the sight of her grief ; and she, who had just been pronounced so blessed in her earthly lot, poured forth the bitterness of a heart which not even the affection of a husband who every day and hour fulfilled his vow to love and cherish her, the growing promise of her children, not all the comforts of her home could awaken to the joyousness of youth, or one moment relieve of its burden ; while the dying woman, who had but one prospect of release from a life of continued mortification and struggle, slept calmly on the humble couch by her side.

But Margaret possessed great powers of self-command, and strengthened in patience by the fear of causing pain to those she loved, she was enabled to preserve a habitual appearance of tranquil cheerfulness, which concealed in a great measure, even from her husband, the secret grief which preyed upon her. Mr Milner did not suspect how deeply the present position of her father weighed upon her mind, for on this one subject sympathy was wanting between them. His own feelings were so different, that he did not attempt to enter into hers ; Mr Milner had himself never been tempted to diverge even in thought from the paths of strict rectitude, and he looked down upon that guilty man as a being too hopelessly fallen to be regarded in any other light than as an outcast, by even his nearest

relations. It would often have been a comfort to Margaret to have spoken openly to her husband on this subject, which lay so near her heart; but she was far too shy to ask for sympathy that was not offered, though from time to time the unnatural restraint placed upon her feelings would give way, and nature seek relief in an uncontrollable outburst of grief, such as has just been recorded.

Margaret had not yet told her husband of her morning's adventure when evening found the little party assembled in the cottage drawing-room: she looked graver than usual as she sat by the window, which was opened to admit the sea-breeze, with her little Edith on her lap. Mr Milner had a book before him, but Freddy considered this an infringement on the privileges of his own peculiar hour, and climbing on his father's chair, he entreated him not to read any more, but to play with him. Mr Milner was not unwilling to be persuaded; he laid down his book, and proceeded to delight Freddy by placing him on the top of the book-case, and various other lofty stations to which only his long arm could reach. These frolics of Freddy with his father occasionally excited Margaret's fears for the safety of her son, but this evening a languid caution was all the remonstrance she roused herself to make. Presently, when Freddy's curls were all in a tumble, and his cheeks red with much laughing, the clock on the mantelpiece struck eight, which sound had a wonderful effect in sobering Master Fred, and next moment a messenger from the nursery tapped at the door. Margaret, according to custom, bade her son bring her the Bible. "Papa read to-night," said Freddy, as he laid it on the table. So Mr

Milner consented and read—not his own selection, but the portion which happened to be appointed for that evening, the parable of the debtors, ending with the solemn words, “So shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one your brother his trespasses.” After which, Frederick and Edith, kneeling at their mother’s knee, repeated together their evening prayer, and with kisses were dismissed to bed.

“Did you overwalk yourself this morning, Margaret? You look tired,” said Mr Milner, almost as soon as they were alone.

“No, I think not; I am not particularly tired.”

“Then you have something on your mind. Tell me what it is.”

The tone, though it seemed to demand rather than to ask for confidence, had yet so much of kindness and interest, consistent with Mr Milner’s peculiar character, that Margaret at once answered, “I cannot help thinking of a very sad scene I witnessed to-day, Edmund.”

“Anything,” asked Mr Milner, “in which my purse or my advice can be of use?”

“The immediate necessity is, I believe, relieved,” answered Margaret; “but, Edmund, have you heard anything of how Mr Pryn’s family are getting on since he left you?”

Mr Milner’s brow clouded at the name, and he replied shortly, that he had no doubt he was getting on as well as he deserved.

“Do you know that he is out of a situation?” asked Margaret.

"I have not heard so, but I think it extremely likely, and he has no one to thank but himself."

"I am so very sorry for poor Mrs Pryn," observed Margaret, "I was told to-day that she sometimes does not know where to turn for bread for her children."

"Who has been talking to you about Mrs Pryn?" asked Mr Milner.

"When I was out to-day, Edmund, Mrs Towers stopped me, and told me Mrs Pryn was very ill and wished to see me."

"A very forward request on Mrs Pryn's part, and one with which I will on no account have you comply."

Margaret's colour rose, and there was a slight nervous trembling in her voice, but she answered quite frankly, "I complied on the impulse of the moment, Edmund, and I think you will be glad I did so; I was able, I trust, to be of some little comfort to Mrs Pryn, and I promised to call again."

"And do you think," asked Mr Milner, in the deepest tone of his deep voice, "that a man who has been discharged by me for misconduct, is precisely one whose family you should distinguish with especial favour?"

"Why, surely," said Margaret, "it is a duty to assist any one in trouble, even though he has offended us."

"A duty with which in this case you were not called upon to meddle; the thing must not be done again."

"What! may I not even go to the house to inquire how she is?"

"On no account whatever."

Margaret perceived that her husband was being betrayed

by temper, into very serious wrong-doing, and her tears, which this afternoon were not far from their source, again flowed fast. It was very rarely that Mr Milner had occasion to accuse his own harshness as the cause of Margaret's tears, and he was somewhat touched by the sight; yet he had no idea of encouraging what he accounted an unreasonable weakness; so he merely said, not without some sternness of manner, "Margaret, don't be foolish; when did you ever find me unwilling to give aid in any case demanding it? I objected only to employing you as the instrument."

"But do you think," asked Margaret, "that it is sufficient to give your money while you overlook the Christian duty of forgiveness? I sometimes fear, Edmund, that you forget that the very terms on which we ask for forgiveness ourselves, is as we forgive others; to-night, too, when not an hour ago you read to us the parable of the 'debtors.' Oh, Edmund! I cannot think that shall ever be your case."

Mr Milner had not too much sensibility, and he replied, coolly, "We will hope not, Margaret, for I believe that in the Christian sense I do practise forgiveness; I am ready to assist the man, as you would have found had you been less impatient; I will give him a credit with both a butcher and baker; and now," he added, "is not that more practically useful than what you proposed doing?"

Margaret wiped her eyes and murmured, "Oh! yes, Edmund;" and Mr Milner felt perfectly satisfied with himself, which he would not have done had he been conscious of having failed in any part of his duty to God or to his neighbour. And this was the comfortable frame of mind in which Mr Milner was passing through life; to act up to

his own standard was his consistent aim ; and he had never yet been taught by any obvious failure that man is at best a being, weak and erring, for whom the fittest prayer is, " God be merciful to me a sinner ! " Thus the very rectitude of his conduct became a snare to him ; since it encouraged him in a self-righteousness, not unlike that of the proud Pharisee, and a harshness in judging of others, to whom he meted out always a justice so stern and untempered by mercy, as if exercised by Heaven towards himself, must have consigned him to the pit of perdition.

Margaret was much distressed at being forbidden to repeat her visits to Mrs Pryn, for she had been pleasing herself with the thought that she had found a new field of usefulness, and exercise for that benevolence for which, from the seclusion of her life, she had fewer outlets than are open to those who live more in the world ; but disappointed though she was, she discerned a duty higher than even that of assisting Mrs Pryn, namely, that of obedience to her husband ; and while complying with his desire, she did so without either murmuring or recurring to the subject. Mr Milner, according to his promise, gave Mr Pryn a liberal credit on several tradespeople ; but, as might have been expected, the intended benefaction was scornfully rejected, and a message so insolent returned, as incensed Mr Milner more than ever against his *ci-devant* clerk.

No communication passed between the families for some weeks, until one morning, shortly after Mr Milner had gone to his office for the day, Margaret received a visit from one of Mrs Pryn's little boys ; he brought her a message that

his mother was very ill, and begged earnestly to see her. This request threw Margaret into the utmost perplexity ; on the one hand, was the entreaty of a dying woman ; and on the other, was her husband's positive injunction, nor had she any chance of seeing Mr Milner before evening. She asked the boy many questions ; and after some debate with her own conscience, determined to incur the responsibility of a visit. Quickly filling a basket with such things as might be of use, she set out under little Edward's escort.

Mrs Pryn had declined rapidly since Margaret last saw her ; she was now quite confined to bed, and the house had an untidy, neglected appearance, which the best undirected efforts of a child like Emily could do little to prevent.

It was evident to Margaret that the assistance needed in the first place was of a very practical kind indeed, and she set about doing what was required. She made Mrs Pryn's bed for her, dressed her in a clean night-gown, swept up the hearth, and put things away in their places: these were menial offices, but Margaret did not shrink from the lowliest service, for she had before her the example of One who said, " If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet." The room had assumed already quite an improved appearance, and Margaret was applying herself to warm some soup she had brought, at the fire, while Mrs Pryn, who looked wonderfully freshened up, was watching her with grateful apologetic eyes, when the attention of all was attracted by the sudden stopping of a cab before the house, followed by a loud knocking at the door. Emily ran to the window, and exclaiming, " Here is Aunt Rubina!" hastened down stairs.

The lady who entered was rather past the meridian of life, but is best described as "fat, fair, and forty;" for the freshness of youth had only given place to a more jovial appearance than is consistent with an earlier period; her clear red and white complexion had a brighter bloom than is often preserved in the heat of this climate; her black eyes, sharp and sensible, looked as if they could not shed tears for the woes of others, and had seldom been called on to drop any for their own; her easy smile and placid brow told of days of health, and nights of sleep unbroken; her dress, which was rather warm and heavy for the season, was handsome without being conspicuous, but everything about it was so *good*, from the thick silk cloak, down to the collar and gloves, that it conveyed the idea of liberal means far more than a more ostentatious style would have done; so great a contrast did she present to the frail form of her brother, that it was difficult to believe they could be thus nearly related.

The meeting between the sisters-in-law was not exactly affectionate, but there was something that expressed relief and confidence, in Mrs Pryn's tone, as, raising herself in bed, she exclaimed, "O Rubina! I am so thankful you are come;" then sinking back she seemed to say, "Now I need take no further trouble."

Miss Pryn glanced her quick black eyes round the room, and took in at once the condition of her brother's family.

"I had no idea I should find you in this state, Anne, but no wonder, living in this stifling place; we must get you away from here."

"You will advise us for the best," said Mrs Pryn; "I hope, Rubina, it is no inconvenience to you having come to Sydney just now?"

"It is a very great inconvenience, for this is my busy time; I did not get shearing over till after Christmas, and there were all the men's wages to pay and the books to make up."

"George did not wish to write," observed Mrs Pryn; "but I thought you would not come unless you could do so easily."

"Business brought me down at anyrate," replied Miss Rubina; "my overseer—whom, by the by, I took on George's recommendation—has turned out a rascal, but I have convicted him, and was obliged to come down for his trial."

"Poor man," sighed Mrs Pryn, languidly, "he has a wife and children."

"Whom I was kinder to than they deserved," exclaimed Miss Pryn; "for, after he bolted, I allowed the family to live on in the hut, and draw their rations, just because I did feel for turning a woman and five children adrift; and as soon as they heard that the warrant was out, they came up to the house and smashed my windows; so there is all the gratitude I got! But now that I am here," she continued, "I shall be able to be of some use to you, and I am glad to find you have a friend with you, Anne."

"A friend, indeed," repeated Mrs Pryn; "a good Samaritan!"

Her sister-in-law turned to scrutinise Margaret, observing as she did so, "We ought all to help one another,

because none of us can tell how soon we may need help ourselves."

Which remark, Margaret thought, would have been better without the conclusion. She perceived that her presence was no longer required. Miss Pryn promised that a servant should be provided before night; and Margaret took leave, satisfied that Mrs Pryn had now with her some one, who, if not in gentleness and affection all that a friend might be, was yet likely to prove kind in the most efficient way.

As soon as she was on her homeward walk, Margaret began to speculate nervously as to how Mr Milner would probably view this transgression of his wishes; for there were few sights she dreaded more than a cloud of displeasure on his face. Mr Milner was very much displeased; but Margaret had made up her mind to bear some reproaches, and did not express any regret for what she had done. This, even more than the visit itself, surprised Mr Milner; that might have been the action of impulse, but here she was deliberately justifying her conduct; it gave him a new insight into her character; he saw that when she believed a duty involved, she was capable of opposing even his will; but in his estimate of her disposition he made one mistake—her strength of purpose lay less in will than in feeling; her feelings had been worked upon, and they inspired her with resolution.

Not many days subsequently, Margaret, while gathering flowers in her garden, observed a funeral pass the gate; the plain hearse was followed by a few mourners on foot, and she was told that it was the funeral of Mrs Pryn.

CHAPTER VII.

MARGARET had at this time one very engrossing subject of interest. A letter from England had announced her brother's marriage, and his intention of immediately returning to the colony, and they now were daily expecting the vessel in which he and his bride should arrive. Many an hour, while sitting alone over her work, did Margaret think about her unknown sister-in-law, sometimes hoping to find in her a friend and pleasant companion—such a person as Gerald in his best moods might have chosen ; at others, she would fear lest he had married some gay woman of the world, and anticipate small pleasure from the addition to her limited circle. One morning the vessel was signalled outside the " Heads," and Mr Milner as soon as possible went on board to meet his brother-in-law, and give the first welcome to his bride.

Margaret questioned him on his return with more impatience than her wont.

" Gerald is very much improved," was his answer to her first inquiries, which were of course for her brother, " both in manner and appearance ; he certainly is a very nice-looking young fellow."

" And what of his wife ?"

" She is a tall, distinguished-looking girl," was the reply,

"extremely lady-like, but the most silent person I ever met with."

Margaret smiled. "Gerald is always ready to do the talking himself; but does she seem very shy?"

"She may be very shy, or she may be reserved, or she may, which, I confess, I think is the case, have really nothing to say. I told her you were looking forward to making her acquaintance, on which she only smiled, and in answer to my invitation she looked at Gerald to reply for her."

An hour or two later Margaret had opportunity of judging for herself, as her brother and his wife arrived from the hotel where they had rooms just before dinner. Gerald met his sister with all his old cordial affection, and presented to her his bride by the name of Lucinda.

Mrs Bright bent a tall, May-pole figure to receive her sister-in-law's kiss; and so this much-thought-of introduction was over, and Margaret found herself seated by her new sister on the sofa, with leisure to observe her more particularly.

Though Lucinda's age, as Gerald subsequently informed his sister, was twenty-one, there was yet much of the school-girl in her appearance; the erectness of her figure was painfully suggestive of back-boards, every look and movement was constrained, and her habit when addressed of glancing towards her husband that he might, if possible, answer for her, conveyed the idea of her having been never accustomed to act or think independently in the smallest particular.

Margaret's first thought was, "How cold and stiff;" but

she had not sat by her many minutes before she became aware that there was a wonderful sweetness in her face ; if chary of her words, her smiles were ready, her eyes were mirrors of truth and candour, and her brow—clear and open as a summer's day—looked as though no cloud of temper had ever ruffled it. But this impression gave place again to another ; one wearied of her face from its want of variety ; the fault of insipidity is often attributed to features which, like Lucinda's, are very regular, but in this case it was difficult to believe that it was not in some degree connected with character.

During dinner, Mr Milner in vain endeavoured to engage her in conversation ; though most of the subjects started were naturally full of interest for a stranger, on not one had she either a question to ask, nor could more than a monosyllable be obtained from her. But if she contributed little to the animation of the party, Gerald talked enough for them both ; he was in a perfect racket of spirits, proud of his handsome, well-born wife, proud of all he had seen and done, and no less proud of all he intended to do ; so he talked, and laughed, and boasted, while in the midst of all this vanity and conceit was an unaffected pleasure at being again in his own country, and an interest in all that concerned his sister and her children, so winning as to dispose others to regard the rest rather as follies to be smiled at, than as faults to be seriously reprehended.

When the gentlemen rejoined the ladies after dinner, they found the latter seated together on a sofa, but conversation at a standstill between them. Gerald had by this time pretty well talked himself out for the present,

and for a few minutes Mr Milner fell into a reverie, thinking—not altogether with satisfaction—on the sort of young man his brother-in-law appeared, and wondering what would turn out to be the character of the shy, unformed girl whom he had married.

“Are you a musician?” Margaret asked, in a rather suppressed voice, wishing to break a pause which Lucinda seemed perfectly contented to prolong indefinitely.

“Yes,” was the laconic reply.

“And are you very fond of music?”

“No.”

“I was going to ask if you would try our piano, but perhaps it would only tease you.”

Lucinda looked across the room at Gerald.

“To be sure,” he exclaimed; “I daresay Margaret has not heard any of the new music; try something from the last opera, Inda.”

Lucinda immediately rose.

“You can play without your book, can’t you?” Gerald asked.

“I do not know.”

“But you’ will try?”

“If you wish it.”

She stood silently by while Mr Milner opened the instrument; then, without further preface, sat down and played the piece which Gerald named, with a brilliancy and execution such as Margaret had never heard equalled. As far as teaching can make a splendid performer, Lucinda was one; but her touch had one fault—it wanted the expression which natural feeling alone can give, thus the simple

taste of Margaret was not half as much gratified as it often had been by many an unlearned musician. Mr Milner, however, was better qualified to appreciate her attainments ; and enjoying a description of music which he now very seldom heard, he stood by the instrument, asking for piece after piece. Gerald saw with exultation the effect produced by his wife's music ; and after some minutes, perceiving that Mr Milner was a fixture by the piano, while Lucinda was engaged on an elaborate sonata, he moved towards the window, and made a sign to his sister.

"If you are not afraid of the mosquitoes, Margaret, take a turn with me round the garden."

Margaret threw her handkerchief round her neck, and stepped into the veranda.

"Have you had any news lately from —— ?" Gerald inquired, after a little hesitation.

Margaret understood him, and she shook her head.

"But all is right in that quarter, I suppose ?"

"I believe, as far as we know, he is in good health," replied his sister, in a grave, sad tone.

"But no chance, I mean, of his coming up to Sydney ?"

"Oh ! I am sure I do not know, we hear so little ; it is only now and then, through Uncle Francis, that we get any accounts of him at all."

"That is so far good," observed Gerald, reflectively.

"I suppose we may reckon on him not coming here ; I will take this opportunity to tell you, Margaret, that mind, not a word on this subject to Inda."

"Very well, if you wish it, I will not needlessly bring it to her recollection ; though really, Gerald, I am inclined to

think very highly of Lucinda ; it is a great proof of her attachment to you that she could overlook so much."

"Overlook what?" asked Gerald, hastily.

"Our poor father's position."

"She knows nothing of it."

"Surely," exclaimed Margaret, "you do not mean that she is in ignorance?"

"Of course she is, who was there to tell her?"

"O Gerald," said Margaret, "you can never have practised so cruel an imposition."

"Cruel imposition! Margaret," repeated Gerald, reddening, "those are strange words."

But unabashed by the severity of his tone, she rejoined, "I trust it is a deception which you do not intend to continue, for while it lasts I can call it nothing less."

"And is the disclosure likely to be less cruel?" Gerald asked, pointedly.

The question brought to Margaret's mind all the wretchedness which had resulted to her from the knowledge of her father's situation ; and a pang of compassion shot through her, as she foresaw Lucinda, in her present unsuspectingness, foredoomed to similar trials.

"And I think I may say," Gerald continued, his usual assurance of manner returning, "that though I look upon myself as very fortunate to have won Inda, her family were no less satisfied with me as a match for their daughter."

"They were scarcely fair judges, I think," replied Margaret ; "what did they know of your position?"

"Quite enough ; they knew that I am very well off, that

I love her with all my heart, and that bringing her out here I mean to give her everything she can wish for to make her happy."

"With all this," asked Margaret, "do you think that if they had known the whole truth, they would have sanctioned the marriage?"

This inquiry stung Gerald to the quick. His sister saw how much he was hurt. "Dear Gerald," said she, "forgive me; I would not pain you by such a question, unless to save you from still greater misery; do, I entreat you, lose no time in disclosing the truth to Lucinda."

"What, now?" exclaimed Gerald, with a kind of shudder, "oh! this is not the time."

"There is no time like the present," said his sister, "to repair a fault; duplicity is not in your nature, Gerald, as a child you were open as the day."

"And am still," interrupted Gerald, "in spite of this, for I had laid no plan of deceit; but they had no suspicion; and cannot you, Margaret, understand the charm of finding myself received for the first time on a footing of equality by persons of respectability? Then, when I came to love Lucinda, it seemed impossible to throw my happiness from me by so unlooked-for and startling a confession. I pictured the cold scorn of Mrs Fane, the indignation of her husband, the grief of my Inda,—and all could be saved, by—not one word of untruth, but by simply keeping silence."

This defence was poured forth with an impetuosity that lent almost an eloquence to the words; and Mrs Milner, as she looked compassionately on the agitated face of her brother, knew not what to say.

"But it seems so strange," she observed at last, "so unlike what I have always heard is the reserve of English society, to admit to intimacy a stranger from one of the colonies, knowing nothing about him. Did they ask you no questions about your family?"

"None but such as were easy to evade. I had made acquaintance with young Fane at Cambridge, and I was received as his friend. Once, at the time I made my proposal, they asked something about my father, and I said"—he stopped abruptly, and an ingenuous blush betrayed the shame which less worthy feeling struggled to suppress.

"And you said what?" asked his sister, anxiously.

"I said that my father resided chiefly in Van Dieman's land, and was one of the oldest colonists."

Margaret shook her head; she felt painfully how, by such evasions, her brother had blunted his conscience, otherwise he could not have failed to see that a suppressed truth is a practical falsehood.

The music meanwhile had ceased within; and the appearance of Mr Milner and Lucinda in the veranda, where he was showing her a beautiful white creeper which blooms only at night, terminated the conversation.

CHAPTER VIII.

GERALD was a charming lover, but was not likely to make a satisfactory husband. In the former capacity, it was no wonder that he had won Miss Fane's affections ; he said without effort or affectation such pretty things to her, and when he stood by her at the piano, looked so handsome and graceful. But he was totally unfit to have the entire happiness of another intrusted to his hands ; he was foolish and inconsiderate, retaining the heedlessness of a boy when he was, and ought to have felt himself, in a responsible situation.

Gerald had written to his brother-in-law from England to take a house for him ; but the one chosen did not come up to his ideas, and getting it off his hands at a considerable loss, he took one much larger, and set up an establishment on a scale of magnificence very seldom seen in this colony. While Gerald was perfectly in his element, throwing about his money, and exerting himself to outshine his neighbours, Lucinda entered into all his plans with the interest of a light-hearted girl, who felt the pleasure natural to her age in show and expenditure ; knew there was plenty of cash, and was unaware of any other reason why such ostentation should be avoided. Mr Milner, however, saw things differently ; and after endeavouring by one or two

hints to check the vain spirit that was at work, he at last spoke more plainly. "People in our position, Gerald," said he, "I may say so, since I am in nearly the same, people in our position should avoid drawing attention to themselves. As long as we are contented to do our duty quietly, the misfortune of our family will be allowed to slumber; but as soon as by a more ostentatious mode of living than our neighbours we render ourselves objects of observation, and in any degree of envy, so surely shall we become marks for ill-natured detraction."

"But," exclaimed Gerald, "I have no idea of skulking along the bye-paths of life. My object is to make myself known. I hope to get into council one of these days, and I mean to leave behind me a name that shall be famous in the colony."

"Do you happen to remember, Gerald," asked Mr Milner, "what that word 'famous' comes from?"

"Why, I suppose it is from the Latin 'famosus,' infamous, is it not?" Mr Milner smiled; and Gerald added quickly, "I never thought of that; I declare it is a very curious derivation."

"Very," replied the other, dryly.

"But, after all, I don't see why a wish to be 'famous' should result in making one only 'infamous,' which is, I suppose, the drift of your argument; fame is surely a grand object to pursue."

"It ought not to be our object at all," replied Mr Milner, in a tone that was calculated to damp Gerald's ardour; "our object should be to do our duty."

"I have a great desire," said Gerald, after a moment's

silence, "to get into the club ; my only hesitation is that there is no saying what the prejudice of some of the members might lead them to do."

"I advise you not to make the attempt," rejoined Mr Milner ; "for your own sake I hope you will not ; you would be *black-balled* to a certainty."

"I have my own misgivings," said Gerald ; "but what a shame it is ! What have I done to be excluded ?"

"Nothing," replied Mr Milner ; "it is a case, and we see many such in the world, in which the innocent suffer for the guilty."

"And where is the justice of that, I should like to know ?"

"I suppose," said Mr Milner, thoughtfully, "that as a general rule, it is well that the line of demarcation between the classes should be jealously guarded, but in individual cases it undoubtedly presses hard."

"What do you do about the club ?" asked Gerald, "you were a member before"——

"I continue to pay my subscription," was the reply, "but I have not been there for years."

Gerald's face was flushed with swelling feelings of anger and mortification. "I will live down this stigma," said he, through his teeth ; "see if I don't !"

"That ambition I applaud," replied Mr Milner ; "only set the right way about it."

But Gerald was one of those people who require to buy their own experience, and the judicious advice of his more reflective brother fell unheeded to the ground. At length the new residence was complete ; and the only thing

wanted to render his establishment perfect, was the elegant open carriage, purchased in England, for three hundred pounds, and which, having been shipped for the colony on board a vessel which met with some delay in sailing, did not arrive for some time after his own landing.

Still there was one object unattained. Mr Bright's fine house was the talk of every one who saw it; he himself possessed every personal recommendation of looks, manner, and education; day after day he showed off his handsome wife in the gardens, at the band, in all the most public places; still no one called upon them,—none at least of the set which he wished to cultivate; society, indeed, he could have had in abundance, persons too of wealth, and in a few cases of colonial influence, but without exception they were individuals whose fair fame was blemished, if not in their own persons, at least in the reputations of their nearest connexions, and who, like himself, were ineligible for the best circles. Gerald did wish to make an effort to rise into a better and a purer atmosphere, and he did feel a repugnance to introduce Lucinda, carefully brought up as she had been, into the society of convicts, or their families; many a visitor did he receive alone in a separate apartment, and frame some excuse to his wife for not having presented him to her.

Such an incident happened to occur one morning when Mr Milner was calling on them. A dashing-looking dog-cart stopped at the door, and Gerald went to the window.

"I am not certain who this is," said he, "but if I give you a look, Inda, you go out of the room."

A black-whiskered individual, whose dress and manner

were decidedly bad style, was announced, and advancing to Lucinda made her a florid speech on the pleasure he felt in making her acquaintance.

"I am afraid," observed Gerald, "that Mrs Bright is particularly engaged at this moment," and he threw the preconcerted glance towards her.

Inda muttered a few words of apology, and obediently left the room. When the visitor had departed, she reappeared.

"I have come back," said she, "as I saw the dog-cart drive away," and the sweetness and simplicity of her expression formed a curious contrast to the embarrassment depicted in her husband's face, and the disapproving severity of Mr Milner's.

"Do tell me, Gerald," said she, going up to the former, who stood leaning with his back against the mantelpiece, "why did you send me out of the room? and you did so once before."

"A man," was the reply, "may have acquaintances before his marriage whom he does not care to introduce to his wife."

"Then they cannot be good acquaintances," opined Inda.

"A man is more particular for his wife than he is on his own account," said Gerald.

Inda looked a little puzzled, though she said no more, and Mr Milner abruptly took leave—abruptly, that is, of his brother-in-law, and of Inda with no small feelings of compassion.

"It is impossible that this should go on," said he to his

wife, when he got home ; “ the way Gerald is hoodwinking that girl passes belief.”

“ Do you think he ought to introduce her to such people ? ” asked Margaret.

“ It is impossible to argue about what he ought to do in an entirely false position,” said Mr Milner, impatiently ; “ his whole system is wrong ; the truth must come out some day, and then there will be an explosion ! ”

Poor Margaret did all that was in her power to induce her brother to have an explanation with Lucinda ; she exerted her utmost influence on this point, though as unsuccessfully as Mr Milner recommended to Gerald prudence and moderation in his style of living. Confession so long delayed had become every day more difficult, until what had been begun almost by an accident was persevered in from false shame and fancied policy through a systematic course of untruth and evasion. In vain did Margaret represent all that could be represented on such a subject ; but her arguments bore chiefly on the religious duty of sincerity, and her brother had not her straightforward, simple mind, to which an appeal to conscience was unanswerable, and of what was politic there might be two opinions. He preferred to leave it to chance to enlighten Lucinda, as in spite of his flattering hopes it inevitably must sooner or later ; and if Margaret urged the point beyond what he found agreeable he would lose temper, and say pettishly that with her leave he would manage his affairs himself. Such being his decision, Margaret did not feel she would be justified in herself informing Lucinda ; but she often gave a sigh to think what would be her sen-

sations on discovering the position of the family she had so unknowingly entered, and the disgraceful deception practised on her by her husband. Mrs Milner felt as if she was herself a party to the concealment, and the consciousness of a forbidden subject threw often a constraint over her manner, which did in consequence very little justice to the kindly feeling which she day by day more warmly entertained towards her brother's wife.

Inda was not much of a companion ; but Margaret felt an interest in her as one over whom hung nearly the same doom as had blighted her youth ; while the notice bestowed upon her children won her to love her long before she found her conversable with herself.

Lucinda had one of those fresh and simple natures which attract and are attracted by children ; it cost her no effort to companionise with Freddy and Edith ; she would tell them stories, stopping abruptly if another grown person drew near, or play with them on the lawn, when her enjoyment would appear no less real than their own. Margaret felt obliged to reprove her son for the unceremonious freedom with which he claimed Lucinda as a playmate whenever she came to the cottage ; he was told also that he must not call her "Inda," but "Aunt Lucinda." Mrs Bright, however, begged that he might be allowed to call her "Inda ;" it put her in mind, she said, of her own little brothers. This was the first spontaneous expression of anything like feeling that Lucinda had uttered ; and Margaret thought that at last she had discovered a subject on which her sister-in-law would converse, so she asked her about her home, and tried to lead her to speak of her own

family ; but again she was disappointed, Lucinda merely answered the questions put to her, and entered into nothing like description. Margaret grew hopeless of ever knowing her brother's wife ; and Mr Milner, a more severe judge, declared there was nothing in her to know.

But Lucinda, like most of us, had been formed by circumstances, and her education had been in some respects peculiar. Captain Fane was an officer in the navy ; and Inda's mother, a woman whose varied talents and acquirements rendered her an ornament to her sex : during the frequent absence of her husband (who was so highly thought of in his profession, that he was constantly employed) all affairs connected with the management of his fine estate devolved on her, and were conducted with a discretion and ability that would have done credit to a man of business ; yet with tact to avoid the masculine air which sits so ungracefully on a lady, Mrs Fane appeared in society only the elegant woman of fashion ; her well-filled days were divided between the claims of business and those of society, in which, from an imposing presence and a finished manner, she was particularly fitted to shine ; and when an hour of leisure permitted her to retire to her own room to unbend her mind over her favourite pursuits these were—what ? fancy work, or a new novel ? No, the politics or scientific improvements of the day. Occasionally, however, we see that the children of very superior parents scarcely come up to the ordinary standard, and so it was here ; Mrs Fane never conversed with her daughters, she had not leisure, perhaps she had not the kind of mind which draws out the intelligence of young people ; every

direction she gave them was the subject of conscientious thought with her, but the result of her reflections was all she imparted to them ; they were told to do this, or that, for the brief reason, first, that it was right, secondly, that it was their mother's order. What this mysterious "right" was, which in one word summed up the whole force of their mother's reasoning, Lucinda and her sisters very imperfectly understood.

Mrs Fane denied to her daughters no advantages of education which money could procure or paid instructors impart ; they were taught everything, taken to see everything that could elucidate their studies ; and being gifted with clear heads and good memories, they retained as much as could possibly be desired of the knowledge which was daily placed before them, cut and dry, with no effort of their own being required to obtain it ; and as, if referred to on any question of history or geography, they were usually able to answer unhesitatingly in the words of their lesson-books, it never occurred to Mrs Fane how little in all they did, their minds were ever brought into play. Lucinda's head was a perfect dictionary of names and dates, but she had as yet never attached to one a single idea ; thus she was less companionable, less capable of acting or thinking for herself to any purpose, than Margaret, whose notions of geography were somewhat misty, and who certainly could not have enumerated the dates of the English kings.

Quite unconsciously, Mrs Milner was at this time contributing more towards teaching her sister-in-law to reflect a little, than any one had yet done. They frequently

spent part of a morning together, and these hours were not always passed by Inda in child's play with Freddy; but sometimes seated at the work-table with Margaret, when she was willing to be as companionable as was in her power to be. From circumstances, Margaret had none of those little gossiping subjects of interest, with which the generality of young woman beguile their time when together; her conversation turned much on matters of duty and religion, often suggesting a question of conduct, though through all she said ran a tone of habitual and subdued melancholy, which struck Inda painfully and strangely. To bear in this world, and to look for recompense to the next, was the view of human destiny so blended with all her feelings, that more or less it was evident in all her conversation; until Inda, who looked around her on this beautiful world, in which she beheld every object gilded with the sunshine of her own bright unclouded spirit, felt a nervous reluctance to believe that happiness must be looked for beyond it, and that the kingdom of heaven, which ought to be the goal of our hopes, can be reached only through much tribulation.

"How sad your sister always looks," Lucinda remarked more than once to her husband; "I never heard her laugh. If Mr Milner comes in, she smiles; but when she thinks no one is looking at her, she sits with her eyes cast down, and so melancholy." Which embarrassing observations Gerald had to turn off as best he could.

Lucinda was very happy during these first months of her Australian experience; she loved her handsome young husband with all her heart; the novelty of everything in

the colony was a perpetual source of pleasure and curiosity ; and when she rode with Gerald on the beautiful horse he had given her, or drew the wild-flowers they gathered in these expeditions, or listened to the rodomontade, half-clever, half-nonsensical, with which he would often entertain her, she had not a wish for anything in the world besides. Sometimes she wondered that she had so few visitors, for Inda knew the usages of society perfectly, and was quite aware that it is customary to call upon a bride ; but she was very unsuspicious, and it was necessary only for Gerald to say that he preferred living quietly, for her to put the wish for anything different out of her mind. But the most beautiful trait of Inda's character was not this readiness to relinquish her own will, amiable and good as it was—not even her unvarying sweetness of temper, but a quality higher than either,—truth. No temptation, whether of vanity or wish to screen herself from blame, ever induced her to represent the smallest thing different from what it was ; she seemed even incapable of believing others different in this respect from herself. When Gerald—much given to exaggeration, and a careless latitude of speech—described things under a false colouring, she would fix her eyes on his face with a half-mystified expression of inquiry, not suspecting him of doing wrong, but supposing that she did not rightly understand. Oh ! many a time did those clear, truthful eyes convey a reproach to Gerald for the part he was acting.

It was not until he had been some months in the colony that his carriage arrived from England ; he bought for it a pair of horses, which the dealer had destined for the gover-

nor, but which his Excellency plainly declared to be beyond his mark, on account of the extravagant price demanded. Gerald was delighted with the opportunity to outbid such a customer, and the entire equipage—carriage and horses together—was unrivalled by any in Sydney. The first occasion of showing it off was a day on which one of the military bands played in public, when Lucinda, elegantly dressed, took her seat in the carriage and was driven to that part of the domain, in the vicinity of Sir Richard Burke's statue, where all that was gay and fashionable of Sydney society was assembled. It was a pretty scene; the sun shone in a sky of cloudless blue, the inspiriting strains of martial music filled the air, and at intervals tones of animated conversation and laughter fell upon the ear. It was an opportunity for nearly every one present to meet their acquaintances; ladies recognised each other as their carriages drew up near together, horsemen here and there threaded their way amid the crowd, and gentlemen, leaning into the carriages, were able to carry on very pleasant little flirtations with the respective objects of their admiration. Mrs Bright alone knew no one; Gerald had not accompanied her, he had ridden out promising to join her at the band, and she sat alone for some time perfectly unattended to. The carriage, however, was one that could not fail of exciting attention, and more than one gentleman pointed it out to his lady friends, saying, "Do you see that carriage—the handsomest on the ground? It belongs to the son of a convict." And the ladies, to whom Gerald's very name was unknown, looked curiously in the direction indicated, expecting, perhaps, to see a female of bold objec-

tionable appearance occupying that shunned carriage; but they saw only a quiet, sweet-looking young woman, seemingly as unconscious of being slighted as she was unseeking for attention. Then—for people will gossip—various remarks were hazarded, some true, others not.

"They say he is a rather fine young man," observed a gentleman; "and his wife is of a good English family."

"I wonder if she knew all about him?" conjectured a lady.

"They say not till after they were married, and that it was a dreadful shock to her when he told her." And it does not follow that those who spoke felt scornfully towards Lucinda, on the contrary, they said, "Poor thing! she is very much to be pitied;" and they felt, for the passing moment, a considerable degree of compassion both for Gerald and his wife, but not remotely did they think that anything should be done to help them forward in society; it was a case in which the sins of the fathers must be visited on the children.

Presently Gerald rode up to the carriage door; he thought his wife looked isolated, sitting there quite alone, and giving his horse in charge of his groom, he took his seat beside her.

Lucinda remarked that she enjoyed hearing the music, and that the domain was very pretty; there were many things that pleased her in this city of the antipodes, and she felt no regret for the home she had left, fifteen thousand miles beyond the sea. Gerald was not in a suave mood. In that crowd, where, if there was a mixed set, there was also the most *élite* society of the place, he felt gallingly his

own position. Where, he said to himself, as he glanced round, do I see any one so lady-like as Lucinda? and he was inclined to quarrel with everybody there, from the wife of the governor downwards, for not seeking to make her acquaintance.

While he was inwardly chafing, and Lucinda listening quietly to the music, the carriage became an object of attention to a different set of persons from those we have mentioned. Two or three idle boys had gradually drawn near, and from expressive looks and gestures among themselves, proceeded to audible remarks.

"Gerald," said Lucinda, "do you hear what that boy says? what can he mean?"

"What did he say?" asked Gerald.

"He said, Are there such carriages as that in Norfolk Island? Is not Norfolk Island where they send the convicts to?"

Gerald's face flushed scarlet, and leaning out of the carriage he harshly ordered the boys to be off.

"Never mind them," said Inda, "they mean no harm."

"They mean to be impertinent," was the reply; and again leaning forward he repeated, "You young beggars, if you don't be off, I will take the horsewhip to you."

This threat did not have the desired effect; the young vagrants drew nearer, and spoke in louder tones than before. "Did that carriage come out of your father's pickings?" was heard from the group; "does he drive the like of them horses in Norfolk Island?"

After a moment's indecision, Gerald ordered the coachman to drive off the ground; but his tormentors, perceiving

their power of annoyance, and increased to the number of a small mob, followed, repeating the former questions, with such variations as the wit of the street suggested.

Gerald completely lost his head ; standing up in the carriage, he snatched the long driving-whip from the coachman, and lashed about him on all sides, while Inda sat by him, pale as death, with the sense of a great horror hanging over her.

That night the disclosure was made, and that disclosure made a great change in Lucinda.

CHAPTER IX.

FROM that day there was a change in Gerald's home ; he had expected what he termed a scene, and had preimagined all that she would say, and all that he would say ; he had resolved to endure her first indignation with exemplary patience, to disarm her anger by his forbearance, and win her forgiveness of his duplicity by the argument, that nothing but the strength of his affection for her could have induced him to commit such an error. But he was unpleasantly thrown out when nothing such as he had reckoned on took place ; Lucinda neither reproached nor lamented, her feelings with regard to the discovery were too deep for words, beyond the power of reproaches or lamentations to express. It came upon her like a thunderbolt ; and overwhelmed with astonishment and consternation, and disappointed in him, it did not seem that the impression produced by all this was likely soon to be effaced. She was an altered person ; the light-hearted unthinking girl, looking up with so much deference to her husband, and seeking for his guidance in every action of her life, had disappeared ; and in place, he saw only a stern-mannered, deeply-offended woman, before whom his usual volubility failed, and he felt, in spite of himself, abashed.

As we occasionally see a flower which, from having been

secluded in the shade, is longer of unfolding than its companions, when it receives a quickening beam of the sun, expands at once to its full maturity,—so it was with Lucinda ; from nature she had received no small share of decision and resolution, of which only the restraints of her education had hitherto prevented her having the use. On her marriage she had transferred to Gerald all the deference which had previously been claimed by her mother and governess ; and blindly to follow his direction was from habit easier than to exercise any will of her own ; but that respect rudely shaken to its very base, her dependence on him ceased ; and forced to consult her own judgment in the perplexing circumstances in which she so suddenly found herself placed, she from that day looked to no other guide. Her first displeasure included the Milners also, believing them to have been party to the concealment ; her impulse was to avoid them entirely ; and though she could not shut the doors against Gerald, she shut herself up in an impenetrable armour of reserve and coldness. This Gerald imagined to be only another, though more disagreeable, form of temper ; and, judging of her disposition by his own, endeavoured to conciliate her much as he might have coaxed a petted child ; but all was alike unavailing, until at last he lost all forbearance, and gave vent to his irritation, alternately in self-justification and angry accusations of her implacability. Not that he could complain of inattention to his expressed wishes, for these were more scrupulously complied with than ever ; but he told Margaret that he believed Inda loved him no longer, she was completely changed to him, and his home was wretched.

Lucinda was herself too young and inexperienced to be aware of all the consequences possible, and even likely, to result from this conduct on her part; that the world offered to Gerald a thousand temptations, from which, if he had hitherto kept clear, it was less from any consistent resistance of evil, than that in the youthful joyousness of his nature, he had found happiness independent of forbidden pleasures; but it was not in a chilling atmosphere, where virtue put on a repulsive mien, that the germs of principle were likely to gain strength, and a still boyish character be matured to the fulfilment of its best promise. Gerald's days were melancholy and unsatisfactory; his rides, deprived of Inda's company, had lost their charm; and he felt a perfect dread of the *tête-à-tête* evenings, during which it is not too much to say that no words, beyond those of the barest necessity, would be exchanged between them.

And Lucinda, how did she pass her time? She had various feminine occupations, and these she pursued with silent perseverance; she understood now why she had no visitors; and as she walked alone through her spacious double drawing-rooms, where gilding and silk hangings were reflected by mirrors on every side, she felt the emptiness of a show and glitter which had so little power to confer happiness. Previous to the fatal discovery, Inda used to go singing about the house; many times it had gone to Margaret's heart to hear that fresh voice warbling in unthinking girlish happiness, for she knew the day must come when the songs would cease; it did so; Inda sang no more after that evening at the band. After an

interval, she went a good deal to the cottage. We have said that at first she avoided Mr and Mrs Milner, but when they assured her that they had all along disapproved of the concealment, and made no attempt to defend Gerald, Lucinda was too just to include them longer in her resentment; so she sought them a good deal, and a common interest drew them closer together than they had been before—not that she felt it an indulgence to speak over her grievance—they had one conversation on the subject and no more;—that discussion, however, was very frank, and the three spoke together more unreservedly than Margaret and Mr Milner had ever done alone. They looked their position in the face; nor did the others attempt to lessen the evil in Lucinda's eyes. Mr Milner confessed that from the day of his marriage his former friends had dropped him; he might, indeed, have kept up more or less acquaintance with the gentlemen who had been his companions, but the ladies of their families, without exception, ignored Margaret. So Inda knew what she had to expect, and deceived herself with no false hopes. Mr Milner, it must be admitted, had made no effort to propitiate society; and he did say that more might be in Gerald's power to redeem a blemished name than lay within the reach of his sister; but for that, he added, a very different line of conduct from the vain and ostentatious course his brother-in-law had adopted, would be requisite.

Then the subject was dismissed, and seldom was again touched upon; they talked of other things. Mr Milner spoke to Lucinda of books, and in a way that was new to her; she remembered accurately the contents of almost

every work she had read, and was far more than usually conversant with the principal events of history; but Mr Milner studied history as a philosopher, and Inda became interested in hearing him trace events to their causes, and began for the first time to attach ideas to the dry facts with which her mind was stored. He had no definite view of teaching her; he took no pains to accommodate his language to the understanding of a girl of twenty, and as his views were all broad and masculine, it cost Inda sometimes an effort to grasp his meaning; but this very effort, to one who had ever had the path of learning laboriously smoothed for her, was of the greatest use. Sometimes Mr Milner would read aloud to her and Margaret, and as often as not he selected poetry on these occasions. Lucinda was well read in poetry, as in almost everything, and could repeat long passages which had been set her as a task to learn; yet it is doubtful whether she had ever paused over one single line to say to herself, "How beautiful!" Mr Milner frequently paused to make remarks, and Inda was astonished to find how much more there was in almost every book than she had ever dreamed of. A spark had at last caught the ready pile, and a flame of intelligence was kindled. Inda had no need to read new books; she had enough to do in reperusing the old, and day by day she was now developing from an unthinking school-girl into a deeply-reflective woman.

Whether her thought always at this time led her to wise action is a different question.

One day a note was brought to her, containing an invitation, from one of Gerald's old friends, to dinner; she read

it, and laying it down without remark beside her drawing-board, resumed her pencil.

"You will answer that note, Inda?" said Gerald.

"Am I to accept or to refuse for you?" she asked.

"Oh, accept for us both," said he.

"I shall not go," observed Lucinda. It was very seldom that she asserted thus a will of her own—never but when there was some strong reason. In the present case, the gentleman to whose house they were invited had, some twenty years before, received a free passage to the colony.

"Then I will not go either," said Gerald.

"In that, of course, you will please yourself."

"Do you not think I am right?"

"You are the best judge of your own actions."

Gerald intended to be conciliating in his offer of staying at home, but her indifference chilled him; after a moment, however, he added, "Let us do something to amuse ourselves this afternoon; let us drive to Paramatta, and lunch there, and spend the day."

"If you desire it, of course I shall go," replied Lucinda.

"Come now, Inda," expostulated Gerald, "don't be cross."

"Cross!" repeated Lucinda, looking at him with a calm, surprised expression.

"Well, you know what I mean; I don't want any of that kind of compliance; I only wish you to do what you like; so whether would you rather go to Paramatta or stay at home?"

"Since you ask me, I would rather stay at home."

Gerald had seated himself beside her, but he hardly

knew what to say next, so he had recourse again to the note, ran his eye over the contents, and observed, "It is just as well we decline this invitation, for they are not very respectable people ; in fact, I have had nothing to do with them for a long while ; so, you see, Inda, I am trying to do what is right."

Had Inda raised her eyes for one moment, and seen the struggle between embarrassment and ingenuous feeling which, on this unwonted humility, appeared in Gerald's handsome face, she might have been touched, and at least offered some word of encouragement ; but as her drawing engrossed, or appeared to engross, her whole attention, she saw none of it, and only replied, "I am glad to hear it."

"And in time," added Gerald, "I may become quite an exemplary character. I shall, sha'n't I?"

"It is to be hoped so."

Gerald pushed back his chair, looked out of the window for some minutes, and then sauntered from the room.

He dined out, but went home soon after dinner, intending to spend the evening with Lucinda. This was another propitiatory measure on his part, and if Inda was not entirely inaccessible, it is probable that in the course of the long evening, spent alone together, her coldness might have yielded, and a reconciliation might have been the result ; but the opportunity was destined not to be afforded. On arriving at home, Gerald found his wife entertaining at tea a young lady who had come out in the same vessel as themselves, and in the presence of a third person nothing beyond commonplaces could pass between them. Yet, to all appearance the evening passed cheer-

fully. Lucinda and her friend played duets, and Gerald sang to an accompaniment of the piano, and talked, and trifled with the stranger, who returned home to tell what a pleasant evening she had enjoyed, and what agreeable people were Mr and Mrs Bright; he so gay and attractive, and she so sweet and amiable; not for a moment suspecting that his light manner concealed disappointment and chagrin, and that even in Inda's sweet smile and gentle tone was something which, as often as they were directed towards her husband, went like a dagger to his heart.

Sydney is invariably pronounced a very dull town by every unoccupied man; other men are, for the most part, engaged through the day. The climate is not favourable to active exercise, at least while the sun is in the ascendant, and there are no picture-galleries or other similar places of amusement, which, in London or a Continental town, are a resort for the idle. Gerald lounged about, for the most part solitary, with nothing to do; sometimes he would wander down to one of the wharves and stand with his hands in his pockets, looking on at what was doing there, not because it amused him, but to pass the time; sometimes, though we must own rarely, he had recourse to the dangerous resource of a billiard-table. One morning he found himself at the door of a house where the signal of a red flag gave notice of an auction; a stream of people were entering, and Gerald sought amusement for the moment by entering with them; the room was crowded with the mixed, and not very choice assemblage, which such places usually show.

"Going for four and sixpence," the auctioneer was saying, "for four and sixpence—going for four and sixpence; will no one give me another bid?"

Gerald wondered what was going for the moderate sum of four and sixpence, and without having the least idea what he was bidding for, said, "Five shillings."

"Five and a penny," was immediately called out by a sharp voice in the crowd.

Gerald glanced towards the corner of the room from whence the voice proceeded, and caught the eye of a man whose head was considerably below the level of most of those present, but whose face was remarkably bright and intelligent. Gerald thought he had seen him before, though he could not recollect where, and the man looked as if he recognised him; his eye, as it met Gerald's, was hot and angry in its expression, and he bid in a tone of personal injury as though he resented his bargain being interfered with.

"Five and a penny," repeated the auctioneer, "going for five and a penny!"

"Five and sixpence," said Gerald.

"Five and sevenpence," was bid by the other.

"Ah!" thought Gerald, "it must be something worth having, since there is competition," and for a few seconds bids rose rapidly between them; but when they had raised the price to eight shillings the stranger desisted.

"Going at eight shillings!" said the auctioneer, "eight shillings; will no one give another bid?"

No one did give another bid, and the lot was knocked down to Gerald at eight shillings.

"Will you give a cheque for the amount, sir?" said the clerk.

"A cheque!" repeated Gerald, who had already drawn his purse from his pocket.

"And your address, if you please, sir."

"Oh! I suppose it is a very small thing," said Gerald, with a rather puzzled air, "I will pay for it, and just put it into my pocket."

A laugh ran round the room, and Gerald was informed that the lot for which he had been bidding so energetically was a very considerable quantity of English bottled fruit, which had been put up at so much per dozen.

He was of course both disgusted and perplexed; but though little conversant with auctions, as he had sufficiently proved, he knew enough to be aware that a bargain is a bargain; so wisely abstaining from starting any objections, he wrote a cheque as required, and escaped from the room.

He was loitering down the street when he heard a quick step behind, and the man whom he had outbid overtook him, breathless with haste.

"How do you do, Mr Bright?" said he; "perhaps you do not remember me."

"Oh! yes, Mr Pryn," replied Gerald, with sudden recollection, and he stopped to shake hands; "I used to see you in my brother-in-law's office before I went to England; by the by, I have not seen you there since I came home."

"No," answered Mr Pryn, stiffly, "I have no longer any connexion with Mr Milner; but my reason for following

you, Mr Bright, was to ask, if it is not impertinent, what you intend to do now that you have got that bargain?"

Gerald shrugged his shoulders: "Live on bottled fruit for the rest of our lives, I suppose," said he.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Mr Pryn, not at Gerald's attempt at wit, but at his perplexity, for few things put him into such good humour as the sight of another in a predicament; "I doubt not they will last you a good while," he said, his eyes twinkling with enjoyment.

"It was my own fault," observed Gerald, "I should have known better; but I have bought a little experience, and shall not be so ready to bid for, I don't know what, at an auction another time."

"I suspected you did not know quite what you were about," said Mr Pryn; "I thought it would embarrass you a little; but what do you really mean to make of your bargain?"

"A precious bargain it is," said Gerald; "I shall let it lie there and never claim it."

"Nay," suggested Mr Pryn, "since you have got the lot, would it not be better to turn an honest penny by it?"

"With all my heart, if you will tell me how."

"I believe I can; put it up again, in small lots, and I think you will find that it will go off very well."

"A very good idea," exclaimed Gerald; "but I shall not bother myself any more about it, I shall only get into some fresh scrape if I do; you are welcome to my bargain if you think you can make anything out of it."

"By no means," was the reply; "though I shall be happy, if you will intrust me to manage the little affair

for you, and to take a commission for my trouble ; I will even, if you wish it, accept half the profits. Shall we make that arrangement, Mr Bright ? ”

Gerald assented indifferently, and the subject was dropped.

They continued, however, to walk together, and Mr Pryn took an opportunity to explain the grounds of his quarrel with Mr Milner, according to his own version of the story, and he found Gerald no unwilling listener. Gerald was not quite so fond of Mr Milner as he had once been, they clashed on too many subjects to draw smoothly together. Gerald was fond of being flattered, and Mr Milner told him plain truths ; Gerald had various foibles which Mr Milner despised, and sometimes showed that he did so ; so altogether Gerald was, in his heart, not sorry to obtain what he thought a handle against his brother-in-law, whom he readily assumed to have acted with as much harshness and temper as Mr Pryn represented.

Gerald found Mr Pryn very entertaining, and decided in his own mind when they parted that he must see more of him. Before many days had passed they did meet again, for Mr Pryn called to report the success of his commission, which had answered his most sanguine expectations.

“ That is a very clever fellow,” Gerald said to himself, as he pocketed the profits which Pryn handed over to him ; “ I make a mistake which would have cost me pretty dear, and there he goes and makes money out of it.”

This disposed him to think very well of Mr Pryn. That gentleman was at this time engaged in a small way of business as a commission agent. He also dabbled in

various little speculations, and by means of the two together eked out a livelihood. Gerald joined him in one or two small ventures, in which little was risked, and the profits to Gerald, at all events, inconsiderable, but they served to occupy and amuse him, and for the most part turned out well.

Mr Pryn had now a house to which he could invite a friend ; since his wife's death his sister had lived with him, and taken charge of his family, and in consequence of this arrangement his establishment was more comfortably conducted than it had ever been, even during the best days of his wife's health. Mrs Pryn, though affectionate and well-meaning, could not be called a good manager, and often, for the sake of some temporary pleasure to the children she would spend money, which might have provided them with substantial comforts. Miss Rubina, on the contrary, knew when and how to economise ; she had every day on the table a well cooked though unpretending dinner, to which it was no disgrace to ask a stranger to sit down ; the children were neatly dressed, and were being properly educated.

" This is very comfortable," little George said one day ; " we never lose our places in school, and we have good dinners every day, and we have never holes in our shoes now."

" Yes," replied his more sensitive brother, " that is nice ; but we have no one now to hear us say our prayers, and to kiss us after we are in bed."

Miss Pryn was in a rather peculiar position for a lady ; she owned a small station, which, with the assistance of an intelligent overseer, she managed entirely herself. The

chief defect of her character was hardness, and thereby "hangs a tale." Rubina Pryn had not been always the woman she now was, whose main object in life was making money. When a blooming girl of twenty she was engaged to be married to a young man, her first and only love ; his affairs went wrong, and he gave her the choice either to break off the engagement, or to marry and share with him the contingencies of his lot ; there was a painful struggle in her mind, but worldliness got the upper hand, and she decided to give him up. One selfish action deliberately done has a very hardening tendency on the character ; from that day Miss Pryn lived solely for herself, and her own interest became her only care. Some years afterwards her lover died, bequeathing to her all that he possessed, viz., his station and stock, which were to be disposed of for her benefit in any way she chose. Miss Pryn, clever and enterprising, saw no reason why a woman might not carry on a station ; and so profitably had she conducted the business that she now not only enjoyed a good income, the interest of an occupation in life, but had a considerable balance laid up at her banker's. When, on arranging his affairs after his wife's death, Mr Pryn expressed a wish that she could remain in Sydney and take charge of his family, his words suggested to her the possibility of leaving her station for a time in the hands of her superintendent, and enjoying a little variety herself. It was a holiday to her to pay a visit to Sydney, and thus she was enabled to do at once a kindness to her brother and to follow her own inclination.

Gerald got the habit of very often dropping in upon this

family after his own late dinner, and spending the evening with them ; Pryn and he had always abundance of conversation, and Miss Rubina, as she presided at her tea-table, entertained him with the gossip of the day. The lady, indeed, was neither young nor handsome, neither very polished in manner nor cultivated in mind ; but she was lively and sociable, and Gerald would frequently draw comparisons, injurious to his own wife, between Miss Pryn's easy good humour and poor Lucinda's repelling coldness. Jealousy of Miss Pryn, in the common acceptation of the term, did certainly not cross Lucinda's mind ; but not the less was it a bitter mortification to her to find herself evening after evening deserted by her husband for the attractions of Mr Pryn's fireside.

CHAPTER X.

MEANWHILE there was one to whom life was opening under some of its hardest aspects ; and by Charles Lancefield the poverty and privation with which he had a daily struggle were the more keenly felt, because so different from the lot to which he had been born.

Some twelve or fourteen years before this time two figures might have been seen, one summer's evening in England, ascending on foot a rising ground on the summit of which they paused, and stood silently gazing on the scene below. The one an elderly gentleman, tall, but stooping and infirm from other causes rather than from age ; his companion a boy of about eight years. Below them stretched a wooded park, in the midst of which rose a castellated mansion ; and this was the object on which the eyes of both were riveted. The gentleman was Mr Lancefield, who had been a stranger in the neighbourhood since the day on which he parted with that property ; but being about to sail from England, had returned, unaccompanied save by his young son, to take a last look at the place which had been his own, the home of his ancestors, and which ought to have been the inheritance of the boy by his side. We may imagine what sad thoughts filled his heart, but it is not equally simple to account for the sorrow which was expressed in the

countenance of his son. He was too young to comprehend all that is comprised in the dread word ruin ; at his age there is a natural love of change and excitement ; the long voyage, with its termination on a distant shore, which, to his parents, was nothing less than a dreary exile, could to him have only the charms of novelty and adventure. He was told that in that far colony the sun was brighter and the sky bluer than in England, and there was no reason why he might not find there a home as happy, if less splendid, than the one he was leaving ; but he caught a sympathetic feeling of his father's sadness, and his large brown eyes filled gradually with tears, which obliterated as by a mist the prospect before him.

At last, as his father turned to leave the spot, he observed ; " Papa, when I am a man, I will make a fortune, and come home and buy back that place."

A rather hopeless smile flickered for an instant on Mr Lancefield's face, as, patting his son's shoulder, he answered, " Ah ! my boy, fortunes are easily lost, but not so easily made." Then the two slowly descended the hill, and disappeared in the twilight.

It was not extravagance, in the common acceptation of the term, which had ruined Mr Lancefield, but rather too great love of the fine arts, and too profuse liberality towards others. For the first, he had lavished sums on pictures and books ; every struggling artist or author was sure to find a patron in him, and patronage is very costly. As the head of a large family, he had shared with his younger brothers the advantages of his fortune ; he purchased promotion for those who were in the army, he used

his interest among a large and aristocratic circle of friends for those who were respectively in the navy, and in the church; though when those gentlemen had reached almost the top of their several professions, they in a great measure rejected the hand which had helped to raise them, or at least became very oblivious that they owed their successful careers to anything beyond their own talents and deserts. At length it began to be rumoured that Mr Lancefield's affairs were disordered, and a day came when large portions of the family property had to be sold; then his friends discovered that he had been imprudent, had wasted his patrimony; and in a fit of prophetic despondency one of his fine lady sisters observed, "I see how it will be, Charles will be a bankrupt, and we shall have to educate his children among us."

"The colonies are the natural opening for people who cannot afford to live in England," remarked one of his brothers; and whether or not this suggested the idea, the thoughts of Mr Lancefield did turn to Australia; money would go further there than in his own country, it would be less galling, he thought, to live among strangers on a much reduced income, and there would be openings for his sons when they were old enough to go out into the world.

Mr Lancefield had to experience what as good men as he have proved before and since, viz., the short-livedness of human gratitude and affection; he saw friends who had crowded his hospitable board one by one fall away; he felt the cooling of even his nearest connexions. These things could not embitter one naturally suave and forgiving, but they cut deeply into his feelings; and after his house, land,

everything, was sold, he went to Australia a heartbroken man.

Mrs Lancefield was a high-born and elegant woman ; she had adorned a distinguished position while she possessed it, but she clung closely to her husband in his adversity, relinquishing without a murmur luxuries to which she had been accustomed from her cradle.

From the wreck of his fortune Mr Lancefield retained a sum, which, employed by a business-like and energetic man, might soon in this colony have placed him again in affluence. But he had little turn for business, and it is not easy on the verge of fifty to make an entirely new start in life. He therefore invested his money in a station, the charge of which he intrusted to an experienced manager. Had that manager proved honest, he probably could have done nothing better ; but the conduct of Michael Bright towards his employer has been described.

Mr Lancefield took a house at such a distance from Sydney as was a hint that he did not wish to cultivate society, and there he employed his leisure investigating the wide and then little explored fields of geology and botany, and in educating his eldest son. Charles Lancefield was a boy of rare promise, there was no drudgery in teaching him ; mastering almost by intuition the rudiments of knowledge, he was soon enabled to walk as a companion rather than as a pupil by his father's side in the paths of learning. Daily they spent hours together in study, and Charles's eyes would kindle with intelligence as his father unfolded to him the beauties of some classic page that lay between them. Mr Lancefield was a great Greek scholar,

more conversant with the ancient tragedies and other writings than is common at present ; now that he was cut off from obtaining the new books of the day, he dwelt much with the geniuses of the past, and he trained his son in his own steps. Then when study was laid aside, Charles would accompany his father in rambles on the sea-beach, where the waves of the great southern ocean dashed their spray upon the rocks, and the lessons of nature supplemented those of his books.

In a home where every influence tended to cultivation, and to real, not only outward refinement, the finer qualities of character could hardly fail of being developed ; thoughtfulness, early piety, family affection, flourished in a soil so congenial to their growth, but it did not equally promote the hardier virtues which are essential for those who have their way to make in the world. It was perhaps not to be expected that Mr and Mrs Lancefield—the one in the decline of life, the other approaching its meridian—should take kindly to the new climate and habits of colonial life ; but there can be as little doubt that their children, of whom they had four, two sons and as many daughters, if left to their own unchecked impulses, would soon have learned to look upon Australia as their home, have made friends for themselves, and been perfectly happy in their adopted country. But this desirable end was prevented by the tone of the conversation which went on around them ; their parents spoke of Australia as a land of exile, of England as home, and thus cherished unintentionally in the minds of the young people a morbid longing to return thither, even after their childish recollections had grown very in-

distinct, and they retained but a very imperfect idea of what England really was. The seclusion in which they lived prevented them making friends. If Mr and Mrs Lancefield had a fault, it was pride; they felt a gentle contempt—if the term be allowed—for those who were less well born than themselves, it could hardly be called an offensive pride, since their manners were never otherwise than courteous; and to any person in distress, no matter of how humble a rank, they were ever ready to offer comfort; but they would not associate familiarly with persons whom they did not esteem their equals, and rather than mix in society not quite to their taste they would have none at all.

The break up of the family circle came very suddenly. Mr Lancefield, while driving one evening in a gig, was thrown out and so severely injured as to be scarcely able again to move a limb; and when, after nearly a year of suffering, death came at last as a release, his wife was utterly worn out by her attendance upon him. As long as her exertions were needed, she seemed to feel no amount of fatigue; but when there was no longer a call upon her, and she lay down, the first time for months, for an undisturbed night's rest, from that bed she never rose again.

Twice within the short space of one month was Charles called upon to perform the sad duties of chief mourner at a parent's funeral; and as he stood on these occasions by the grave with his little brother in his hand, an impression was made upon his mind which years did not obliterate.

It would be impossible to imagine a situation more desolate than that of these four young people, the eldest of whom was barely twenty; the only persons to whom they

had any right to look for direction were the doctor who had attended their parents, and their lawyer. These gentlemen came forward with the best advice that, under the circumstances, could be offered ; they recommended that, as Charles was studying for the Colonial bar, he should carry out his original intention ; that his sisters, who were extremely accomplished, should procure situations as governesses ; and that Henry, the youngest of the family, should be placed in an office where he might obtain at least the pittance which is accorded to the services of a boy of twelve years. To none of these proposals was any objection raised by the orphan family, except to the last ; Charles was extremely unwilling, he said, to cut short entirely his brother's education, and force him prematurely into the occupations of a man ; by strict economy he thought he could contrive to keep him at school for a few years longer, at all events he intended to try. The young ladies obtained situations—the one in Hobart Town, the other to accompany a family to India.

It was a bitter trial to these young people, who had nothing but their mutual affection to brighten life, to be so severed ; and in the case of Charles especially there was nothing to counteract the depressing influence of his misfortunes. Society was not likely to pay much attention to a young man who at times could hardly afford to dress as a gentleman. His thoughts dwelt perpetually on the parents who were dead, and on the sisters who were eating the bread of dependence among strangers, and soon an expression of deep melancholy became habitual to that young, handsome face.

Ere long, too, was added to his other troubles a new source of deep anxiety—the charge he had undertaken of his brother was no light responsibility. Henry Lancefield was a boy on whom the best lessons and example were very much thrown away, he was the black sheep of the family; not that he did not love his brother, and at times, when thinking of all the privation Charles underwent for his sake, would make the fairest resolutions of amendment; but his was one of those reckless minds to which the discipline of school is insupportable, and for which idle and worthless companions have an unfortunate attraction.

“I want to be in the navy,” he said, more than once, “and then I may be an admiral some day, like grand-papa.”

“It is impossible for you to be in the navy,” replied Charles; “I have no interest, nor the means of letting you study navigation. I think, Henry, that when we have all had to give up so many of our wishes, you should not refuse to bear your share of disappointment.”

In reply, Henry would only sulk, often for an entire evening, but not unseldom when he was in bed, and saw the glimmer of his brother's lamp, as Charles sat up half the night finishing some writing for which he was to receive a small remuneration, he would cry himself to sleep, thinking of his own ingratitude. Where there is sensibility, good hopes may be entertained of a character; but woe to such a boy if any strong temptation comes in his way before feeling has ripened into principle; there is little chance of its being withstood, and his downfall is likely to be rapid and terrible.

CHAPTER XI.

It was a happy day for Charles Lancefield when he made the acquaintance of Mr Towers; that he was poor and friendless was a reason in the eyes of this benevolent man for showing him attentions which to one rich and prosperous he never would have gone out of his way to pay. He it was who first taught Charles that all was not over for him in life, because parents and sisters were gone; and this he did, not by undervaluing all he had lost, but by stimulating him to look forward, pointing out the happiness which arises from successful industry, and that new ties might yet spring up which should prove no less dear than those that were broken. Why! with youth, health, and talent, life was only beginning for him; and it rested with himself, in a great measure, to make his future what he pleased. So he encouraged him with strong and hopeful words; for Mr Towers had once himself been friendless in a foreign country, and he remembered well that his own feeling was not a pleasant one as he first stood alone on the shores of Australia, even though he had come there by his own will and choice, though he had hope and energy to support him, and knew that daily prayers went up for his welfare from a large and loving circle at home.

Then he gave Charles an invitation to Westleigh, where

his own hospitable intentions were fully carried out by his worthy wife; and if any one remarked to Mrs Towers on the kindness they showed to young Mr Lancefield, she would reply, "Oh! I think that one of my boys, my Henry or my Sydney, may be some day in something of the same position, and I should be very glad to know that some one would be kind to him."

At Westleigh, Charles saw what may be attained by energy and perseverance.

Mr Towers had come to this colony with next to nothing, but now, in middle life, he found himself surrounded with all the comforts of affluence. This wealth he did not regard as the means by which he might mount a step or two higher in the scale of society, but valued for the use that could be made of it in his own sphere; it was shared with his friends in an open-hearted hospitality, and with the poor in a liberal, though far from indiscriminate, charity. From long habits of definite employment, business had become too much his element for him to have any inclination to lead—even now he could afford it—an idle life; but while he continued through the day his attention to the old routine, he every afternoon retired to the beautiful estate in which he had invested a considerable portion of his savings, a few miles out of Sydney. There he enjoyed the society of his family and amused himself with his garden, which was his hobby; there he entertained his friends, and gave his children first-rate educations. He was generally to be seen as we described him at the first interview, dressed, that is, in a wide tweed coat, decorated with very large bone buttons; and in summer always in a cabbage-tree

hat. Thus attired, he was not, we must admit, a very presentable object in elegant society ; but let us not confound eccentricity with vulgarity—eccentric he was, vulgar he was not. He was a rough diamond, but the gem was there, and in a favourable light its sparkle might be discerned ; his recreations were all those of a superior man ; he was skilled in botany and geology ; had a correct knowledge of music ; and though ignorant of the practical part of drawing, understood sufficiently the theory of the art, to judge well of the comparative merits of artists, and to criticise his daughters' progress in the use of the pencil. Thus, though peculiar in appearance and unattractive in manner, there were few persons more stanch as a friend, and to any one of at all similar tastes, more delightful as a companion, than Mr Towers.

There were none to whom, when the acquaintance was once made, his hospitality was more frequently extended, than Charles Lancefield, and for him, confined to a small town-lodging the greater part of the week, the escape to a pretty country place, at just a sufficient distance to afford a pleasant walk, and where he was sure of receiving a cordial welcome, offered as bright a holiday as can well be conceived. Varied in topic were the conversations held on such occasions with Mr Towers, while the latter did the honours of his garden and green-houses, or sat with his young friend over the dessert after dinner ; and these were to Charles as improving as the discourse of a clever, sensible man, through whose most everyday conversation runs a vein of superior integrity, benevolence, and religion, can be. Enjoyable in a different way were the cool summer

evenings, when the hours flew unnoted by in the pretty pleasure-grounds, while he helped the young ladies to knock down ripe oranges and peaches, and to fill their baskets with flowers. As charming, and, perhaps, leaving a still more agreeable impression on the mind, were the evenings which succeeded, when there was no gay party of strangers, but the quiet enjoyments of a domestic circle for him who had none of his own. Then Mr Towers would read, Mrs Towers ply her needle for the benefit, generally, of some of her smaller children, and Charles and the elder girls amuse themselves with music, either lively or devotional, as the case might be.

For all this kindness Charles had it, of course, not in his power to make any return, in the ordinary use of the word, but such as was in his power he made; namely, by entertaining for Mr Towers the highest regard and respect; listening, with unfeigned interest and good nature, to the domestic stories in which, from old habit, Mrs Towers was wont occasionally to indulge; and last, not least, by falling in love with one of the young ladies.

Lydia Towers, whom his affection, and in this case we may say his good sense, selected, was about three and twenty, nearly his own age. If we say, that from an imposing height, and a certain pleasing mixture of animation and self-possession in her carriage, she was a rather fine girl, it is the utmost that can be allowed in favour of her personal appearance; her features were ordinary, and her hair sandy; and yet no one could be surprised that she should win the best love of any man of sense and discrimination who had opportunities of knowing her well; she had every talent

and good quality of her father without his eccentricity; for Mrs Towers, with a woman's appreciation of such things, knew better than to allow her daughters to acquire any habits peculiar or ungraceful; and seeing that they possessed much of that strength of character which is apt to despise conventionalities, she contrived, by enforcing attention to dress and manner, to counteract on these points the effect of paternal example. Accomplished and informed far beyond the generality of girls in the colony, Lydia had been taught that her knowledge was only valuable as it opened her mind to take a clear, more enlarged view of her duty; and her accomplishments, chiefly as they contributed to the happiness of those around her; every precious talent lent her, whether natural or acquired, being exerted for the benefit of her fellow-creatures in a spirit of active, untiring benevolence. In a word, a superior education had formed her a superior character. After conversing with her for some time, Charles felt that he went forth strengthened in all his best and noblest feelings, prepared to oppose more steady resistance to the temptations of the world, to regard of less moment its passing trials, and to keep more consistently in view the great object of a Christian's hope. To the dictates of a sensitive and ready conscience, Charles lent ever a willing ear; and to all that can most touch our feelings in religion he was keenly alive; but the questions which he regarded much through the medium of poetic beauty, she placed before him in the light of principle.

It was, however, long before he ventured to address to Lydia any definite words of love; for such is the influence

of wealth, that he who, had he retained his original position, might have mated with the nobility of his own country, did not here dare to aspire to the hand of the rich *parvenu's* daughter. One of them clearly was in a false position ; question, which ?

Charles Lancefield did not omit to refer to Mr Towers the proposal of a partnership made to him by Mr Pryn. As he spoke of giving up the law, and trying his luck in some speculative business, Mr Towers looked very grave. "I never," said he, "knew any good come of a man who chops and changes in his profession ; and as for Pryn's schemes of money-making, I look upon them as visionary and delusive in the last degree."

"Do you not, then," said Charles, "believe that 'there is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the turn, leads on to fortune ?'"

"I do, very much so," was the reply, deliberately, after a moment's reflection ; "and the difference between one man and another is, that one has judgment to see and to seize his fortune at the turn. But," continued Mr Towers, "I think that the tide of your affairs is on the turn in a sense different from what you mean ; it at the present moment rests in the balance whether you will trust to your own industry for getting on in the world, or catch at the ephemeral chances of fortune ; it is very rarely, I believe, that steadiness and perseverance, united, as in this case, to a certain amount of talent, are not eventually rewarded with success."

"It is a good while now since I was called to the bar," observed Charles, "and I have never yet had a single brief."

"Do you do all you might to make yourself known?" asked Mr Towers; "you should attend the courts more than you do, and try to make friends with some of the attorneys."

Charles muttered, rather indistinctly, that some of the attorneys were distasteful to him.

"When a man is in earnest, he does not consult his peculiar tastes," observed Mr Towers. "It is not the divided heart, in business any more than in religion"—the last words were spoken in a graver tone—"that ever achieves anything; but this proves to me, what I have suspected for some time, that you care to pursue your profession but as little as you can, and that your interest is engrossed by other subjects."

Charles remembered Mr Pryn's remark that he never would have taken his room for that of a young lawyer, and he felt convicted by Mr Towers's words. "I should like to know," pursued that gentleman, "how you spend your evenings?"

"I read generally."

"What?"

"I am very fond of the ancient authors, and I am improving myself in Greek."

"With what object?" asked Mr Towers, "you know it quite well enough already."

"Oh, I assure you," replied Charles, modestly, "that I am far from conversant with the language; I am myself quite aware of my own deficiency."

"You may come short, perhaps, of the attainments necessary for a Greek professor in a university, but for any

use it will be to you in life, you know it more than sufficiently."

"Do you, then," asked Charles, "despise classical attainments?"

"Far from it," was the reply. "I will not affect to despise a branch of knowledge simply because I am deficient in it myself; I often deplore the defects of my own early education; but when classical studies come to absorb a man's attention to the exclusion of things more immediately connected with his profession, then I do call them a waste of time."

"I have found great interest lately," observed Charles, hesitating, "in attempting translations of some Greek plays, and also in revising—possibly with a view of collecting them into a volume—some of the essays which I read at the 'School of Arts.' You, sir, as well as others, were good enough to speak of them favourably; do you disapprove of this employment?"

"There is no reason," answered Mr Towers, "why a professional man may not employ his intervals of leisure with literature; we owe to barristers many of our standard works, both learned and of a lighter character; but it is dangerous for a very young man to take to such occupation; it becomes very engrossing, as I am sure you will admit, and the profession is likely to sink into a secondary object."

"Still," said Charles, who was willing to make a defence for his favourite pursuits, "it is, after all, principally a question for personal consideration; if a man is contented to give up all idea of rising in his profession, and looks

to it merely to afford him a moderate subsistence, his conduct affects no one but himself."

"And do you suppose, young man," asked Mr Towers, almost sternly, "that any one is so placed in this world that his conduct affects no one but himself? or that any individual is at liberty to employ his talents merely according to the selfish impulse of his own inclination?"

Charles looked somewhat abashed by the reproof, but observed, after a moment's pause, "I was very ambitious once; when a boy, I was foolish enough to think that I might make a fortune, and buy back the family property which my father sold."

"And a very praiseworthy ambition it was," replied Mr Towers; "any innocent ambition serves as a stimulant to industry, though I confess I am sorry to hear a young man with your advantages of birth and connexion, who might therefore be of great service to the colony, speak of Australia as a place wherein merely to make money which is to be spent elsewhere."

"I have come to see," observed Charles, gravely, "that birth and connexion, though you call them advantages, Mr Towers, are of very little real use to a man."

"You are wrong there, Lancefield," replied Mr Towers; "it is no mean advantage to have inherited, through several generations, the manners and habits of a gentleman, and to be eligible, from birth, as well as from other things, to take your place in any society. You are surprised, perhaps, to hear a *parvenu* like myself speak up for the advantages of ancestry, and would expect more radical sentiments from me; but I am not a radical in any particular,

I am only a liberal conservative." He smiled as he made this avowal of his opinions, then added, "But I did not intend to diverge into politics; I was only going to remark, that in every new country there seems to be a tendency to a democratic tone; we see it carried out to an extreme in America, and we have a leaning that way ourselves. I confess I do not wish to see more of an American spirit creep in among us; and what we want to prevent this are men of family and connexion to throw in their lot with us, and give a tone to the rising generation—men, in a word, of your own stamp; we cannot spare you from the future of our colony."

The future of the colony was a subject on which Mr Towers was very fond of descanting; he liked to prognosticate the time when the many resources of this great continent shall be developed, and had little doubt that her suggestive emblem of the "Rising Sun" had been well adopted: but as his predictions, deprived of his own energetic delivery and expression, would lose half of their flavour, we forbear to record them.

Charles Lancefield had wisdom to profit by the advice of the friend older and more experienced than himself. That evening, when he returned home, he wrote to Pryn, saying that he had resolved to adhere to his present profession, and declining any share in his speculations.

"That is a very fine young man," Mr Towers remarked to his wife, when Charles's decision had been made known to him; "I shall be surprised if he does not do well in life."

Lydia looked up with an involuntary smile of pleasure,

but, catching her father's eye, looked down again with a deep blush.

Charles Lancefield possessed many of the requisites for a successful lawyer ; he had great power of concentrating his attention on a given subject, and the same patience and perseverance as had made him a proficient in the ancient languages were equally adapted to master the intricacies of law ; he had a clear logical head, and natural eloquence. Hitherto he had never applied with the same earnestness to his profession as to more enticing pursuits ; and it was a half consciousness that such was the fact that made him resent Mr Pryn's remark relative to his reading, for he knew that he was not right in this, not acting in accordance with the precept, " Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." But Mr Towers's conversation had inspired him with new energy ; from that date he resolved to turn over a fresh leaf, and the same night he locked away his Greek books and manuscripts, that they might no longer be a temptation to him. If, he said to himself, he still did not get briefs, it should not be because he was indolent, or deficient in legal knowledge.

While doing now energetically all that was in his own power to get on, he had a secret source of encouragement ; Mr Towers's expressions of esteem for men of birth had increased his self-reliance, by showing him that he possessed something which even rich men valued, and he felt as if Lydia was not out of his reach after all. One day, when Mr Towers had been particularly kind to him, he asked whether he would consider him presumptuous in thinking of his daughter.

"Not at all," was the reply ; "you are Lydia's equal in every respect but wealth, and in birth far her superior. Were I to hesitate, it would be on the ground that you are too much so ; your own desire seems to be to return eventually to England, and I have no wish for my girl to be slighted by your fine relations."

"Lydia is fit, sir, to take her place in any society," observed Charles ; "and I should like to see the relation who would slight her as my wife and keep friends with me."

Mr Towers smiled. "My only object for my children is their happiness," he remarked ; "still, I cannot sanction anything imprudent, and until you see your way a little more, any engagement would be so ; indeed, it may be as well that you do not speak to Lydia until we have some proof that you are likely to get on in your profession."

Charles hesitated, then said frankly, "Well, sir, I should ill repay all your kindness were I to do anything you disapprove ; and I promise that I will not speak to Miss Towers until you give me leave."

Sooner than perhaps either of them expected Charles had an opportunity of showing his own capabilities. He got his first brief ; it was one of considerable importance—a case in which the entire chance of his client depended on his counsel, and involving many of the niceties of the law. It would have been no great wonder if so young a pleader had lost the cause ; but he gained it, and reaped thereby laurels which repaid him for the drudgery of months. At a dinner of the law faculty which happened to take place that night, he had the gratification of hearing himself referred to as a "rising young member of the bar ;" and Mr

Towers meeting him the following day, heartily congratulated him, saying, "I think we shall do now, Charles; you must come out to Westleigh and receive the compliments of my family."

"I am almost afraid to trust myself at Westleigh," replied Charles, "unless I may speak to your daughter."

"You may speak to Lydia; only do not," he added, laughing, "on the strength of one brief settle your wedding day; that is, supposing she accepts you."

In spite of this sobering reservation, there was something in Mr Towers's manner which encouraged Charles to hope that he was not destined to meet with a repulse; and so it proved when he spoke to Lydia.

That evening, when Charles returned to his lodging, about as happy as a man could be, he opened a private drawer in his desk and took out a red morocco case. The cover was faded and worn, but when opened, the contents dazzled the eye, for like a row of glittering dew-drops lay a string of diamonds. They were the sole remnant of his mother's jewels, and in giving them to her son Mrs Lancefield had said, "You will keep them for your wife; I shall never see her, but I am sure she will be worthy of you, and you can tell her when you give her them that your mother would have loved her very much."

The case then contained a larger quantity; but after the death of his parents, when Charles had come in, not to any rich inheritance as the representative of an ancient family, but into a weight of responsibility and care as sole protector of his orphan sisters and brother, he could not bear to think that the girls were going out as governesses while

he had money locked up in jewels. So he had them valued, and disposing of three-fourths of them, divided the price in equal shares between his sisters and Henry. He had no hesitation in departing thus from his mother's intention in her legacy, for he said to himself, "My mother was a wise and good woman, and I am sure she would approve of what I am doing." But he never thought of converting his own portion into money, even when most hardly pressed; for these diamonds had a sacred value in his eyes, and he felt as though they contained his mother's blessing to his future wife. So there they had lain, never looked at until now when they were taken out to be presented to his bride.

He carried the case out with him to Westleigh the following day, and made his offering to Lydia. Miss Towers had seen very few diamonds, for there are very few in the colony; the deficiency of jewels is the only respect in which Sydney ball-rooms fall far short of those of England. Ladies for the most part dress well, but there is not that lustre which jewels alone can give. Except the diamonds of Lady ——, the governor's wife, Lydia had never seen any, beyond an occasional brooch or ring; and she looked at the sparkling contents of Charles's case with an expression in which somewhat of deeper feeling mingled with surprise and admiration.

"I don't know what I shall think of myself in diamonds," she remarked; "they are the first that have ever been in our family."

"They are the last which remain in ours," said Charles.

"The last diamonds of one family, and the first of another," said Lydia; "I think there is an omen there,

Charles ; you must regain a position in which it will befit your wife to wear them."

"You may say achieve," remarked Charles, "for any position I may gain will be unconnected by any link with the past."

"Better still," said Lydia ; "in a new country, among a new people, you will be the architect of your own fortunes." Charles smiled, well pleased to accept the omen.

The days which followed were marked in white for Charles. True, his marriage day was indefinitely postponed ; but so happy was he in his engagement, that he could not wish the time to pass, and he felt sometimes that it was scarcely wise even to look forward. Not that he allowed his newly acknowledged love to interfere with his profession ; no, diligence in business was inseparably connected in his mind with Lydia, and his hands were at this time very full ; his success in his first cause brought him into notice, and briefs now came in fast upon him ; all day therefore he was hard at work either in court or studying in his rooms, but every evening he walked out to Westleigh, and strolled with Lydia amid the orange groves, and sometimes he would repeat to himself Schiller's lines—

"O, dass sie ewig grünen bliebe,
Die schöne zeit der jungen Liebe!"

CHAPTER XII.

"I AM afraid your brother is getting into mischief," said Mr Milner, one evening, as he turned his chair to the fire by which his wife was seated ; " I see him perpetually with that fellow Pryn, and he could not have a worse companion."

Margaret looked up anxiously at her husband. " Could not you advise him, Edmund ? "

" No ; I shall offer Gerald no more advice," replied Mr Milner, somewhat loftily ; " he has utterly disregarded any I have given him, and I wash my hands of his affairs ; not," he resumed, as Margaret began to look distressed, " that I am offended in any way, but simply because it is no use."

Margaret was not a talking woman, but as she sat over her work she thought of what her husband had said, and tried to find out the most likely means of saving Gerald. It was no great wonder, she said to herself, if he did get into mischief, when his home was so uncomfortable ; and it was there she felt that the change ought to begin, as any advice offered to Gerald was likely to have little effect so long as Lucinda continued what she was. For some time past Margaret had grieved to see the footing on which her brother and his wife were together ; though, admitting that

the latter really had a great deal to forgive, she did not feel that any one had much right to blame her for whatever means she might adopt to manifest her displeasure; but now that her coldness seemed driving her husband into dangerous company, the case was altered, and Margaret decided that it was her duty to speak to Lucinda. She did not come willingly to this conclusion, for Margaret was unfeignedly humble, and she shrank from offering advice to one whom she regarded as cleverer, and who certainly was far better educated than herself; but her brother's welfare was at stake, and much as she had often been forced to blame him, she would have gone through a great deal for his sake.

An opportunity of speaking to Lucinda was not long wanting, and the first time they were alone together she entered on the subject. She did not warn her sister-in-law that by the line of conduct she was pursuing she would infallibly lose the affections of her husband, and that the day would come when she would wish to draw him back to her side, and that it would be then too late; such expediency arguments were foreign to Margaret's nature, and would probably have been slightly rejected by Inda; but she told her that her present unforgiving, unloving behaviour, was not what a wife owed to the man whom she had taken for better, for worse, let his faults be what they may; that she was breaking her marriage vow, and rendering his home miserable by her unforgiving disposition.

Inda maintained her own position very stiffly for some time, and defied Margaret to accuse her of any failures of duty to Gerald. Mrs Milner only shook her head. "How

inadequate," said she, "are the cold performances of duty to satisfy the demands of affection; and without attempting to defend Gerald, you must remember that it was his very affection for you which led to his duplicity."

To this Lucinda replied with considerable indignation, "That is what Gerald says himself, but do not you try to deceive me or yourself by any such weak argument; it was not love for me, but his own vanity which led him to make the concealment—vanity, which is the ruling trait of his character. When I married," continued Inda, in a tone of more feeling than her usual, "I loved Gerald most fully and confidingly, he was literally my first love; and yet I do not hesitate to say, that had I known then all I know now, I would never have consented to be his wife."

"I cannot blame you for that feeling," replied Margaret; "but, dear Lucinda, the thing now is not to dwell upon the irretrievable past, but to do your duty in the present. Gerald has many good qualities, and he loves you with all his heart. I do think that your influence might go far to correct what is amiss in his character; but he is impetuous as a spoilt child. If you persevere in treating him with coldness and neglect, he will break away entirely, and the consequence," she added, in a lowered tone, "may be the loss of his soul."

Margaret, unlike some people, knew when she had said enough; she did not weaken the effect of good argument by recapitulation; so having stated her opinion, she took up a piece of needlework and quietly occupied herself with it, while Lucinda sat absorbed in her own thoughts. There seemed to be a struggle in the mind of the latter, for it was

some time before she broke the silence which ensued. When she spoke, it was as follows :—

“ Margaret, you have placed things before me in a new light. I believe I have taken a false view of my duty ; but it is not too late to amend, and from this day I shall do differently.”

There was something particularly frank and noble in Inda's manner of confessing herself wrong, and Margaret looked up as much surprised as gratified. “ And you are not offended with me ? ” she asked.

“ No,” was the reply, “ I am obliged to you ; you have done your duty, and you have shown me mine.”

Soon afterwards she returned home, kissing her sister-in-law before she went ; and Margaret took leave of her with the conviction that Gerald was about to find a change in his wife which would prove very much for his happiness.

But Lucinda was of too really ingenuous a disposition, in spite of her apparent reserve, to rest satisfied with merely making a change in her behaviour, without offering atonement in words also. When once she was convinced of a fault, no false shame withheld her from confessing it. As soon, therefore, as she found herself alone with her husband, she expressed her contrition for the unhappiness she had lately caused him, and frankly and humbly begged his forgiveness.

Gerald was precisely a man to be touched and won by such a concession. All the repentment which for the last some weeks he had nourished against her, vanished in an instant ; but a very few words of humility were needed on

her part to make him exclaim impetuously, "My darling ! I have nothing to forgive. I alone have been to blame. I behaved infamously, Inda ; and if you had not been more than an angel "——

"Hush, hush," interrupted Inda.

That evening saw them not only reconciled, but more really friends than they had ever been, even during the happy days following their marriage. The concealment had been a constant barrier to confidential intercourse. Gerald had treated Inda much as a mere plaything ; he had loaded her with presents, and dressed her in fine clothes ; but living in dread of a home thrust, he had shunned, rather than sought, intelligent companionship. But now they spoke long and unreservedly on all the hitherto forbidden topics ; and many a startling revelation came to Inda's knowledge then for the first time, connected with the trial, and her husband's possession of his fortune,—particulars which Mr Milner had not taken upon himself to impart to her.

"Then," said she, at length, Gerald having informed her of Mr Lancefield's unsuccessful litigation with his father, "the money we are spending should by rights belong to Mr Lancefield ?"

"Mr Lancefield has been dead for years," was the reply.

"Well, his son, I have heard of a Mr Charles Lancefield."

"They could not substantiate the claim," answered Gerald ; "the case had a fair trial, and the law gave it against them."

"I know nothing of law," observed Inda ; "but I have heard papa say that law and justice are not always the same ; and, certainly, the simple, straightforward view of

the matter is, that if a person has been defrauded, restitution should in common honesty be made."

Gerald began to fidget uncomfortably in his chair. "That is a woman's way of putting the case," he observed; "why, carry that out, and Lancefield would have a claim on me, not only for the original sum, but for interest and accumulations during somewhere about seventeen years. Such restitution would reduce us to beggary."

"That," said Inda, slowly and thoughtfully, "can make no difference in the right of the case."

Gerald rose restlessly from his seat and stood on the hearth-rug, biting his lip and knitting his brow.

"Is Mr Charles Lancefield rich?" Inda asked.

"No, as poor as possible, a briefless barrister; I believe he has begun to get business lately."

"O Gerald!" exclaimed Inda, "and here are we living on wealth that ought to be his. I shall never enjoy anything that we have again."

The conversation was broken off by the lateness of the hour before any conclusion had been come to; but Gerald passed a sleepless night, for a question had been raised in his mind and he could not settle it either way without a struggle.

Hitherto he could hardly have been called dishonest for retaining possession of the fortune. Too young at the time of the trial to know anything of the proceedings, it had never since struck him that there could in justice have been any appeal from the decision of the court in his favour; even the blunt refusal of Mr Milner to accept any portion with Margaret, had scarcely been understood in its true light; at all events, he merely considered his brother-

in-law over fastidious. But his wife's words laid hold of him, and his own sense of honour did not allow him to repudiate her suggestions. Lucinda did not renew the discussion, but Gerald betrayed how much the subject was in his mind by abruptly resuming conversation at the point at which it had terminated the previous day.

"You know, Inda dear, if we make this offer of restitution to Charles Lancefield, it will involve the greatest possible change to ourselves. I shall have to turn to some profession to make us an income,—*what*, would of course remain to be considered."

"I think you are clever enough to turn to anything you choose," observed Inda,—a compliment which gratified Gerald; "and I am not sure but what you would be all the happier for having an occupation, and the object of getting on in your profession."

"I am thinking less of myself than of you," replied Gerald; "you married me believing me a rich man, and," his face flushed, "however much I deceived you on one point, I had no intention of misleading you as to my means. Before we do anything, you must count the cost; we shall have to break up our establishment entirely, to leave this house and go into some very small one."

"In that case," replied Inda, "I should love and respect you so much, that I believe I could be happy with you in a cottage, much happier than I could ever now be in this fine house."

They had other discussions on the subject, but the final result was that a letter, the joint composition of the two, was written to Charles Lancefield.

CHAPTER XIII.

CHARLES LANCEFIELD did not unqualifiedly accept Gerald's offer of restitution ; he was perfectly aware of his own claims, but justice on one side begets generosity on another, and he did not for a moment contemplate reducing Gerald to poverty ; neither did he express any overwhelming astonishment on receiving the communication, feeling probably that in similar circumstances he would have done the same. But his reply was in a tone most gratifying to Gerald's feelings ; and after one or two letters, and one or two personal interviews, an arrangement was entered into which was, we may say, fair to both parties.

Though not reduced to the straits he had anticipated, it was now necessary for Gerald to do something to augment his diminished income ; and Mr Milner immediately came forward with an offer of partnership on terms very advantageous for his brother-in-law. But Gerald had from the first discussed his affairs with his friend and confidant, Mr Pryn, and had already almost given a promise of entering into business with him. Pryn's plans sounded very reasonable ; he proposed to extend the agency business, in which he had himself already a small connexion ; it was safe, and when carried on on a larger scale would be remunerative ; his sister, he had little doubt, might be in-

duced to invest a portion of her savings in the firm, and they might occasionally venture on a speculation when any offered that was likely to be profitable. So far every thing was smoothly arranged; but when Gerald mentioned the subject to his wife, she advised him to have nothing to do with Mr Pryn as a partner. Gerald was unprepared for, and vexed by, opposition; he was aware that Lucinda had never liked Mr Pryn, and thought that in raising this objection she was merely falling back upon an unfounded prejudice.

"I cannot think," said he, "why you have such an aversion to Pryn; I should have imagined him just the sort of fellow you would have liked; I am sure he is a clever, superior man."

"Clever he may be, but he is not a superior man."

"Where is the difference?" said Gerald, pettishly, "I see none."

"Do you not? I see a great deal."

"Why! what do you call a superior man?" asked Gerald.

"A man who makes a superior use of his ability."

"I don't see," observed Gerald, "that Pryn makes a bad use of his."

"Why, you have told me yourself," answered Lucinda, "that he is nearly a freethinker; and when there is not religious principle, what security is there for a person doing well in any thing?"

But Inda's opposition only served to irritate Gerald without convincing him, and this was, perhaps, in part owing to the estrangement which had so lately existed

between them. The quarrel was to all appearance quite made up ; but a breach of that kind leaves its consequences, and Lucinda's powers of persuasion were not what they might have been but for that coldness. He had learned during that interval to do without her, to prefer the advice of others ; and it was a fact, to which she became day by day more painfully alive, that her influence with her husband was not great ; he would argue with her, try to bring her over to his opinion, but if they differed, take his own way.

The partnership was carried out, in spite of Lucinda ; Gerald, as possessing greatest capital being the acknowledged head of the firm, though Pryn had an advantage in understanding the technicalities of business, while the other had everything to learn. Gerald, however, turned with both energy and intelligence to his new pursuits ; he had proved by experience that idleness does not confer happiness. Often, when possessing means to gratify almost every passing fancy, he had felt at a loss how to dispose of his time ; and he now entered heartily into a profession which afforded him at once occupation and an interest.

Though Gerald had not foreseen any personal advantage from making restitution to Charles Lancefield, it now became evident that this act of justice would do more to raise him in society than any thing he had ever done. As long as he endeavoured to assume a position on the strength of his fine house and fine horses, he had simply gained for himself the name of being ostentatious and absurd ; but now he took higher ground, and though he had moved into a smaller house, and laid down one-half of his

establishment, several persons called upon him who had before kept aloof.

The first of these was Mr Towers, who came introduced by Charles Lancefield, and assured Gerald that he had great pleasure in making his acquaintance. He was pleased with what he saw of both Gerald and Lucinda, and reporting well of them at home, his wife and eldest daughter called the following day.

Mrs Towers was not above her husband in birth, nor were her manners more polished than might have been expected from her original condition. Lucinda was too much accustomed to really good society not to perceive at once that her new acquaintance did not belong to quite her own rank in life; but she was also struck with the perfect sincerity, the motherly kindness of Mrs Towers's homely manner, the native good sense, and absence of all pretension in her conversation; and Inda had discernment to value these qualities as they deserved. She liked Mrs Towers, she said afterwards to her husband, very much; while in Lydia she found a companion suited to her taste in every way.

Mrs Towers gave them an invitation to Westleigh. "On Tuesday," said she, "we expect some friends to dine, and shall be very happy if you and Mr Bright will give us the pleasure of your company to meet them; or," she added, "if you would prefer coming to us in a quieter way, to walk about and see the grounds, we will fix another day."

Inda thanked Mrs Towers, and was about to reply that she would very much prefer the latter, when Gerald checked her with a look, and answering for her, accepted Mrs

Towers's first invitation. This point being settled, the ladies took leave, having made a most successful visit.

"How little nonce you have, Inda!" said Gerald, as he re-entered the drawing-room after handing Mrs Towers to her carriage; "but for me you would have refused that dinner-party, where we shall probably meet some of the best society of the place."

"For my own part," was the reply, "I should much have preferred spending a quiet day, as Mrs Towers gave us the choice."

"It would not have been the same advantage," observed Gerald; "here we have been wishing to get into society, and now when an opening offers better than we could have expected, you would throw it away."

Inda rather proudly answered that she did not wish to force herself into any one's acquaintance.

"There is no forcing about it," said Gerald, rather pettishly, "all I want is opportunity to be known." And he threw a glance at the mirror which hung near. Inda smiled, but said no more.

This dinner-party was an event of more importance than can be estimated by ordinary rules. To Inda it was her first introduction to society in the colony, while to Gerald it was no small thing to be admitted into circles from which he had hitherto been excluded. To her there was a good deal of penance mixed with the pleasure, but he was simply exulting, and he eagerly asked his wife what she intended to wear, for Lucinda had a quantity of finery which she had no opportunity to use.

Had she been left to her own choice, her selection would

have been very simple ; but Gerald attached far too much importance to the effect of first impressions to consent to her going among strangers, or appearing himself, without every advantage of dress.

When Gerald had placed his last turquoise stud in his embroidered shirt-front, arranged his curls to his satisfaction, and given a final self-complacent look in the glass, he went into his wife's room to interfere at her toilette and tease her maid with directions. The girl was fastening a pearl spray in her mistress's hair, and Gerald stood by, suggesting and advising with an earnestness worthy of a better cause. Inda privately thought she would have been better less elaborately "got up ;" but having expressed her opinion, she yielded to her husband's wishes, as she did every point on which her scruples were not conscientious. When all was completed, Gerald surveyed the result with great satisfaction, pronounced her a very well dressed woman, and that she did him great credit by her appearance.

As they drove up to the door at Westleigh, they encountered the carriages of two gentlemen who held high official situations ; and Gerald observed to his wife, " You see I was quite right, I knew Mr Towers is in the best set."

The party, nevertheless, was not exactly what he expected ; persons of the first position were there, and on terms of intimacy and friendship with the family ; but the company was by no means exclusively from one set, there were present some whose dress and manners betokened them to belong to far other than fashionable society. Next to a

leading judge sat a missionary who had lately landed in Sydney, after escaping dangers, and almost death, among the South Sea islanders ; but nearly every member of the party was distinguished in some way, either for scientific attainments, talent, or worth.

Conversation had therefore none of the insipidity so common at most dinner-tables, but was varied and interesting in a high degree. This was the style of society which Mr Towers delighted to draw around him. In such a circle it need hardly be said that any extra care in dress was thrown away. Inda, with the unpleasant consciousness of being over fine, could have wished all her ornaments in the bottom of the sea ; while even Gerald, as he listened to the superior conversation going on around him, and looked on the faces of men who were doing in their day real work for the good of their generation, felt for the first time that the character of a coxcomb is unworthy a man who possesses education and ability to fit him for anything better. By every one present he was treated with frank kindness, and not one word or look passed that could wound his feelings in any way. Yet even here was a lesson to him ; in this society he was received, not because he was rich or handsome, nor for any of the advantages on which he had hitherto piqued himself, but because he had acted in a way which won him the respect of right-thinking men.

At this party he had the pleasure of meeting a relative whom he had not seen for many years ; when a gray-haired gentleman came up to him and addressed him by name, his own memory was quite at fault.

"You do not remember your uncle Francis," observed the other, "though we might rather have expected the want of recognition to be on my side, as you have changed since I last saw you from a little boy into a fine young man."

"My dear uncle," Gerald then said, kindly and cordially, "I certainly did not at first recognise you, for you have changed also; your hair has grown gray, which it did not use to be."

"Yes," replied Mr Francis, with a smile, "time leaves its traces upon us all; it has turned my hair gray, and one day will bleach even those bright curls of yours, Gerald. Happy if we are redeeming the time, living not as fools but as wise."

Mr Francis was a man who had ever most literally

"Along the cool sequester'd vale of life
Kept the noiseless tenor of his way;"

but he was known to some by the good he did, and in all he said was a tone of reality and sincerity which carried a certain weight with it, and made Gerald feel that unpretending as was the appearance of his relative, he was not a person to be slighted. He invited him to his house for as long as he intended to remain in Sydney, and honestly wished the invitation to be accepted.

"I will come and see you, certainly," was the reply; "but I make no stay in Sydney, my home is in Hobart Town, where I have my own duties and occupations, as we all have, or ought to have; no doubt you have many yourself."

A few weeks before, Gerald would have found it difficult to say what were his duties or occupations, but now he replied with some self-satisfaction, "Yes, I am very busy; I am in my office from ten in the morning till five in the afternoon."

"That is well," observed Mr Francis; "though labour was originally given as a curse, the absence of it seems a greater. The only thing to guard against is, that we do not become too engrossed in pursuit of the bread which perisheth."

"No, of course," replied Gerald, in a less confident tone, "but what is your occupation, uncle?"

"I am a city missionary," was the reply.

"What is that?" asked his nephew.

"A missionary to the lanes and alleys of a large town, where, I assure you, there are as many heathens and persons needing conversion as there can be among the tribes of the interior."

"And you spend your life among them!" exclaimed Gerald; "it must be very disagreeable work."

"That is not quite the light in which we look at it," said Mr Francis, with a smile; "not but what there are great discouragements; though if we gain only one soul, our labour is not lost. But why do I say *one*," he added; "why should we not gain all? The Lord's arm is not shortened that He cannot save; and if we fail of converting even the most seemingly hardened, it must be that we do not sufficiently plead the promises, not that He is willing any should perish."

The pale worn face of the lay-missionary kindled with

an enthusiasm which made his nephew look at him with a mixture of astonishment and veneration. Here was a man as eager, as really interested in the pursuits to which he devoted his life, as Gerald could be in his ; but how different those pursuits were—they were heavenly, not earthly aims ! What good people there are in the world after all, his frivolous young nephew thought, and wondered of what kind of peculiar clay such a man can originally be made ; it did not occur to Gerald that self-denial and prayer can train a human spirit into something almost divine. He introduced his uncle to his wife. Mr Francis, as he approached the sofa on which Lucinda was seated, thought that his nephew's wife, with her pearl necklace and voluminous dress of pale lilac silk, looked a very fine lady, who would care little for anything he could say. But he found himself agreeably mistaken ; Inda listened to his conversation with respectful attention ; she became interested in an account he gave her of some of his labours ; and her mind, ever open to the reception of new ideas, received some beneficial impressions while conversing with him. Had Inda at this time been married to a man of superior character, there is scarcely any degree of excellence to which she might not have been formed,—so ready was she to benefit by every opportunity of improvement which came in her way. As Mr Francis detailed to her some of the temptations and struggles of those among whom he had cast his lot, she felt how little she, in her guarded home, had hitherto known of the trials which encompass so large a portion of mankind. She felt it was a noble work in which he was engaged, that of alleviating human sin and misery ;

and remembered with regret how little good she and Gerald had ever attempted to do when possessed of ample means which they had squandered on their own gratification, and now the opportunity was in a great measure taken from them. Still she determined to watch and try, and various schemes of self-denial occurred to her mind, to the end of leading a more useful life than she had hitherto done. *How*, was a problem to be solved at leisure; though by suggesting to this young woman new views of Christian duty and of the claims of others, Mr Francis had become a missionary even in Mr Towers's drawing-room. It is written, "Blessed are they who sow beside all waters."

In the course of the evening, Mr Francis took Gerald a little apart, and lowering his voice, pronounced a name which his nephew could never hear without a shudder. He asked whether he was aware that his father's time of penal servitude was expired, and that he was again a free man. Gerald received this piece of information not without some apprehension, and inquired anxiously whether there was any chance of his coming to Sydney.

"That I cannot tell you," was the reply, "nor do I at this moment know where he is; but I am inclined to think not. As a ticket-of-leave holder, he has taken to shepherding and sheep-washing, and seems so much to have assimilated himself with the companions among whom he is thus thrown, that any return to the habits of a higher class would, I suspect, cost him a greater effort than he is likely to make."

Gerald was of course aware that his father had by his crimes forfeited whatever status as a gentleman he had

once possessed, though his pride did not relish being brought face to face with the fact ; but he was relieved to hear that the danger was small of coming in contact with his degraded parent, and with his customary light-heartedness he put the disagreeable subject from him. This was the only *contretemps* which occurred ; he enjoyed the evening extremely, and Inda, when she got over her uncomfortable feeling about her dress, no less so. She and Lydia were mutually much attracted by each other, and laid that evening the foundation of an acquaintance which ere long ripened into friendship.

To Inda, especially, a new friend was a great acquisition. Gerald was now absent from her great part of the day at his office, and having been accustomed to the companionship of several sisters, she felt solitude depressing. On her invitation, Lydia would often drive into Sydney, and take luncheon with her ; and soon Inda felt that her introduction to Mr Towers' family contributed more to her happiness than any event that had befallen her since her arrival in the colony.

It is natural to suppose that an acquaintance, commenced as was that of Charles Lancefield and Gerald, with circumstances so peculiarly calculated to draw them together, and to make each think well of the other, would result in their becoming close and intimate friends ; but such was not the case ; the acquaintance, though pleasant as far as it went, seemed somehow to stand still where it began ; and this was chiefly owing to the influence of Mr Pryn over Gerald. That gentleman spoke of Charles Lancefield in disparaging terms, as a great prig, a very

slow fellow ; indeed, he had experience of him in a little matter of business, and had reason not to think very well of him ; he did not wish to injure him in the opinion of anybody, so would not enter into particulars ; but he could not say that he had behaved altogether fairly towards himself. These insinuations had insensibly an effect upon Gerald ; not exactly prejudicing him against Charles Lancefield—for he could not deny that he had been treated by him in a manner the most handsome and liberal—but they cooled his desire to make of him a chosen and intimate associate.

Charles Lancefield had at this time almost everything to make him happy. Most unexpectedly he had come into possession of an independence, which was all the more valuable, as it removed the only apparent obstacle to his marriage ; he had won the hand of the woman whom he loved, and his profession was a daily increasing source both of interest and of emolument. He would then have been perfectly happy but for one trial, the misconduct of his brother.

Henry was now of an age to do something for himself, and was fortunate enough to obtain a situation in the office of one of the principal merchants, with such promises of promotion and future partnership in the event of his doing well, that Charles looked upon his brother's fortune as being as good as made. But after a trial of one month, Henry declared the confinement to the desk insupportable, and nothing would content him but he would go to sea. He was too old for the navy, and the merchant service alone was open to him ; then, he would enter the merchant service. In vain his brother and Mr Towers remonstrated, assur-

ing him that he very little comprehended the disagreeables that would fall to his lot when serving his apprenticeship, as he must do, before the mast; nor was it, they said, quite the thing for a boy whose connexions all belonged to so totally different a sphere, to choose voluntarily that branch of the profession. On this reference to his relations, Henry's face assumed an expression of the bitterest scorn; much good his fine relations had ever done him, he observed, it was likely he was going to be put off a profession because they might not think it suitable. The wilful boy would take no advice; and his friends being forced to relinquish their opposition, within a very short time he sailed on his first voyage with a merchant captain.

Charles's first thoughts on his unexpected acquisition of fortune were generous; he thought of his sisters, whom it was now in his power to render independent; he settled a handsome portion upon each, and wrote, assuring them of a welcome in the home which he was now in a position to offer. But (we mention it only in passing) both of these young ladies were fortunate enough to make extremely comfortable marriages, and became settled in homes of their own.

CHAPTER XIV.

"WILL you drive with me this afternoon, Gerald?" Lucinda asked, as she sat with her bonnet on awaiting the carriage.

"Yes," was the reply, "but I have something to do at one of the wharves, so we will drive there first, if you do not mind."

At the wharf Gerald alighted, promising not to detain her many minutes. There was not much to engage Inda's attention on the spot where the carriage had drawn up. Close at hand was a large dingy-looking vessel, fitting out for her homeward voyage, with "London" on her stern. Many a weary mile of sea had that ship traversed since she left the port where that name was painted; and through how many a yet more weary one, braving the cold and tempests of Cape Horn, must she plough her way ere it can be reached again! On shore were the usual groups of sailors to be seen; a woman offering peaches for sale at a penny a dozen; a stray Chinaman with his pig-tail coiled round the back of his head. All this did not interest Inda, and her eyes roamed in preference over the harbour, which, lying calm and clear in the afternoon sunshine, the blue expanse of water fringed and relieved by the irregular outline of the north shore and Balmain, was

pleasant to look upon. Inda idly amused herself watching the progress of a little boat. Seated in the stern was an old white-haired man, the sole passenger, whose luggage consisted of a bundle tied in a blue cotton handkerchief, and a walking stick. As the boat reached the landing-place, an altercation arose about the fare, the boatmen demanding a remuneration which the old man was unwilling or unable to pay.

"Look, Gerald," said Lucinda, as her husband rejoined her, "those boatmen seem to be taking advantage of that poor old man. Perhaps he has not money to pay them; could not you go and settle the dispute?"

Gerald was good-natured though careless, and turned negligently to comply with her request. Inda was sufficiently near to see, but not to hear, what passed. She saw her husband speak to the contending parties, then, after a moment, the old man seize his hand with a broad look of pleasure, and Gerald draw back in evident surprise and embarrassment. Inda supposed he was expressing his gratitude for getting his fare paid, but the next instant Gerald ran up to the carriage door.

"You must go home alone," said he hastily, "I—I am not ready."

His voice was so agitated, and his manner so altered from the careless indifference with which he had left her, that Inda exclaimed, "Something has happened. O Gerald! what is the matter?"

Gerald glanced nervously round, then bent forward into the carriage, and whispered, "That is my father; by all that is horrible, he has come up from Van Dieman's Land."

Inda's face grew pale; for a moment she sat speechless, but recovering herself, she said, in a tone of calm, self-control, "We must take him home with us. Will he get into the carriage?"

"What! drive with him through the streets in an open carriage?" exclaimed Gerald.

"Since he is here," said Lucinda, "we must do our duty."

"We can't do that," was the reply; "you go home, or take your drive, do anything you like, and I will look after him and find him a lodging."

"Gerald," said Lucinda, in a tone of surprise and reproach, "you cannot put your father into a lodging, you must bring him to your own house." There was an expression of decision in her face, such as Gerald had seen once or twice before, and he knew there was a latent spirit in her which he did not much like to rouse; Inda, complying as she usually was, was not one to be trifled with.

"Well, you go on," said he, "and I will follow in a few minutes." With the servants almost within ear-shot, it was, of course, impossible to prolong the conversation; and Gerald, having desired the coachman to drive Mrs Bright home, returned to his father, who still stood at the water side.

How had they recognised each other, Inda subsequently asked her husband. He hardly knew, he replied; he believed one of the boatmen called him "Mr Bright," and he had a confused recollection of hearing the old man exclaim, "Jerry," and of him seizing his hand, but he con-

fessed that his remembrance of the moment was very indistinct.

Gerald had a great deal of that kind of pride which deadens the natural affections, but not enough of that better sort which is indifferent to the opinion of others. In this unexpected meeting with his father, every filial sentiment merged in selfish feeling. The old man was, in his way, pleased to see his son ; and there was not a little fatherly pride in his tone, as, scanning Gerald's tall figure from head to foot, he exclaimed, " My word ! you are a fine fellow ! " But Gerald did not feel one moment's pleasure in the recognition, nor one spark of affectionate emotion ; his only sensations were those of overwhelming embarrassment and vexation. As an excuse for him, it must be remembered that he had not seen his father since he was eight years old, and could not therefore entertain much personal regard for him. They quitted the wharf together, Gerald looking out anxiously for a closed cab, but no disengaged vehicle was to be seen, so he was compelled to accompany his father on foot to his own house.

The old man leaned heavily on his son's arm as they walked along the street, his white hair floating in the breeze, the blue handkerchief and its contents attached to the end of his stick, suspended over his shoulder. Suddenly Gerald stopped, and beckoning to a boy, desired him to take charge of the said bundle, and to follow them with it at some distance. Mr Bright, senior, however, objected to part with his property.

" No, no," said he, " I know what boys are, and there is not one of them I would trust to carry my things behind me."

"Then he shall go on in front," said Gerald, shortly, and taking the bundle not very gently from his father, he delivered it to the boy, and motioned to him to walk on. It was the hour at which George Street and Pitt Street are most frequented; Gerald drew his hat far over his face, and never raised his eyes during that walk, suffering the while agonies of false shame.

Inda meanwhile had ordered a bed-room to be got ready, and employed the interval before the arrival of her guest in preparing herself to give him such a reception as her conscience told her was due to her husband's father. If Gerald's consternation at this unwelcome arrival was in any part caused by dread of how his wife might behave, that fear was soon put to rest; Inda acquitted herself in the introduction with the most perfect politeness, and Gerald as he watched her attentions to the old man's comfort, felt an astonishment at her self-possession, which was equalled only by gratitude for her forbearance; he did not yet know how strong in Lucinda was the sense of duty and the power of principle.

"Thankee, Jerry!" said their guest, when his son passed the wine after dinner, "I am not used to these fine wines of yours, and, if you please, I will rather take a glass of rum and water."

"I am afraid—I believe we have no rum in the house," replied Gerald.

"In fact I generally," resumed the old man, "spend my evenings at the tavern, there I can take my glass of spirits and a pipe, and not inconvenience anybody; and may be, my lady here does not like the smell of tobacco." Lucinda

had already detected too much in the conversation and manners of her father-in-law that bore testimony to his familiarity with the society of taverns, and seeing that, both for their own respectability, as well as for his future good, the habit of spending the evenings as he described must if possible be broken, she answered his hint with the assurance that they could without the least trouble send out for some rum, and begged he would have no scruple in smoking on account of her not liking the smell. Gerald, on the contrary, with his usual short-sighted policy, was half-tempted to get rid of his father for the present evening, reckless of the disgrace he must bring upon the family by resuming his habits of low company. He however complied with his wife's request to ring the bell, though the furious pull he gave, and the imperious order to the servant, were a safety-valve for the anger which was fast rising.

The rum was brought, and Mr Bright proceeded to make himself more at home than he had yet done in the house ; he spread his cotton pocket-handkerchief over one of Lucinda's embroidered cushions, where his arm was to rest. Inda did what she could to add to his comfort ; she placed a little table beside him to set his glass on, and removed out of his way the things that were upon it. As she pushed aside some books, Mr Bright took up one, and looked at it curiously ; it happened to be Gerald's small copy of Horace.

"Can you read this here, Jerry ?" asked his father.

"To be sure," replied Gerald, "every gentleman knows Latin."

"Well, I never had any turn for learning myself, and I have forgotten the little I ever had ; I can write my name

to an agreement, and I believe that is about all ; you, Jerry, always took more after your mother than me. Do you remember how often she used to bring you in when you were playing outside the hut, and put you on a clean pinafore, and make you learn your lesson ? ”

Lucinda looked up with some curiosity, for even yet she knew very little of her husband's antecedents. There was a good deal in the above speech which happily for her she did not understand ; she did not, for instance, comprehend that the agreement alluded to by her father-in-law was a contract by which he bound himself to work for a master ; but Gerald understood, he bit his lip in confusion and exclaimed, “ I think your memory is not very good, father.”

“ The devil it is not ! ” said the old man, not well pleased.

“ Don't swear, father, it is ungentlemanly,” said his son, frowning ; “ I wish, too, you would give up calling me ‘ Jerry.’ I hate it, it is so vulgar.”

“ Yes, yes, Jerry—well, I won't call you so since you don't like it ; but it is reading those fine books that has taught you to think so many things vulgar, and to despise them as hasn't so much learning as yourself, though it may be your own father.”

“ I should hope,” remarked Lucinda, “ that such is not the effect of learning, since it is generally through the kindness of parents that young people obtain good educations.”

“ Yes, parents generally mean kindly towards their children,” replied the old man, with a sigh ; “ but it is not all thinks as you do, ma'am.”

“ My name is Lucinda,” remarked Mrs Bright, gently ; “ you must not call your son's wife ‘ ma'am.’ ”

The unfeigned kindness with which this was said, sunk deep into a heart which yet could feel ; the old man made a motion as if to take her hand, but checked himself, and said in a husky voice, " God bless you for speaking so to one who has nothing but his children to care for upon earth ! "

" You have not seen your daughter, Mrs Milner, yet," said Lucinda ; " I am sure you will be pleased with her two pretty children."

" Maggie's children ! " repeated the old man in a reflective tone, " to think of little Maggie being married and a mother ! "

" We must get your father some more respectable clothes," were Lucinda's first words when her husband joined her after having shown his father to his room for the night.

" Yes," was the reply, " I shall see to that to-morrow, and also I hope arrange about his lodging."

Inda was brushing her long hair at her toilet ; since their diminished fortunes, she had insisted on doing without a maid ; she now stopped short, with the brush in her hand, and fixed her eyes on her husband's face. " Gerald, you do not think what you are saying ; you cannot intend to send your father out of your house to live by himself in a lodging."

" He can't live here," said Gerald, who looked as if he would have preferred the fact being somewhat differently stated ; " I never for a moment contemplated subjecting you to such a disagreeable." Inda thought that however disagreeable Mr Bright might prove, it was only part of the trial which her marriage involved ; but she forbore

saying so, and answered, "Do not do wrong from any fancied consideration to me, for I am prepared to go through with what I believe my duty, and while there are spare rooms in your house you have no excuse for not accommodating your father."

"But you don't know," said Gerald, "what a man like that is when he is quite at ease ; you might have seen something of it to-night with his rum and his pipe, and when he gets used to us, and feels at home, it will be ten times worse."

"For all that," said Inda, "he is your father, and nothing can release a son from the duty he owes to his parents ; I am sure Margaret would say the same."

"Ah ! Margaret," exclaimed Gerald, brightening up as a new idea struck him, "let him live with her to be sure—that is, if Milner will consent."

"Mr Milner I feel assured will not consent, nor do I think he is called upon to do so. We cannot suppose that your father's example would be beneficial to the children ; no," Lucinda continued, "it is quite clearly our duty, and no one else's, to afford your father a home as long as he chooses to reside in Sydney."

But, as was often the case in their discussions, neither convinced the other. Gerald, already chafed and irritated by the occurrences of the day, was little in a humour to bear opposition, nor is it pleasant at any time to have a duty which we are resolved not to perform placed very clearly before us. He grew angry, spoke harshly to Lucinda, and went to bed feeling that there was a certain inconvenience in possessing so very conscientious a wife.

After breakfast the following morning, he accompanied

his father to Mr Milner's, where there was an affecting meeting between the old man and his daughter. Margaret felt none of her brother's false shame ; he was her father, whatever he was, and as she remembered her mother's dying injunction, she felt thankful to think that now the time had come when she might be able to redeem her promise and do him good. She kissed his toil-worn cheek, and felt no sentiment of repugnance or contempt.

They sat together, Margaret holding one of her father's rough hands in hers, while she tried to tempt the children to come and speak to him. Little Edith drew shyly near, but Freddy held back, and declined any advances to familiarity ; he evidently thought that his mother was taking advantage of his simplicity in telling him that that shabbily-dressed, working-looking man, whom he was surprised to see sitting on the sofa in the drawing-room, was his grandfather ; he had a grandpapa in England, he said, but no relations in Australia, except Uncle Gerald and Aunt Inda.

"But this is Uncle Gerald's papa, and my papa," explained Margaret, who fain would have spared her father the mortification of being rejected by his grandchild.

While this was passing within the cottage, Gerald conversed apart with his brother-in-law in the veranda. Mr Milner, feeling probably that he would not have brooked interference were the case his own, offered no opinion as to Gerald's duty in the present embarrassing circumstances, further than might be implied in an expressive, and perhaps involuntary raising of his eye-brows when the other first spoke of engaging a lodging ; but he said at once, as

Inda had foreseen, that on account of his children it would not be in his power to receive the old man into his house, although he was ready to contribute pecuniary assistance to any reasonable extent ; but Gerald found a salve to his conscience in undertaking to provide for his father, and declined to allow Mr Milner any share in the expense.

That very morning he made inquiries about a lodging, and so actively did he bestir himself in the necessary arrangements that within a very few days a home was prepared for his father.

The old man made no opposition when informed that he he was to leave his son's house, but suggested that he might be accommodated in the nearest "public;" it would be no greater expense, and he would prefer it. This proposition, it need hardly be said, Gerald rejected in a very summary manner ; and without consulting him further, hired a couple of neat rooms from a quiet respectable family. The same day he gave orders to a tailor for a complete outfit of clothes, and these were ready as soon as the lodging.

Gerald assisted his father to don his new habiliments, and Mr Bright, when thus well dressed, with his white hair nicely combed, looked a really handsome old gentleman, having still remaining something of that proud independent bearing which Gerald inherited from him. His son accompanied him to his new abode, to see him, he said, comfortably installed.

The accommodation consisted of a small sitting-room, and a bedroom, opening off each other, and by the joint exertions of the brother and sister had been provided with

various comforts and conveniences to which the old man had been so long a stranger, that of some it may be doubted whether he would even know the use. White muslin curtains adorned the windows, near one of which stood a large easy chair ; a vase of fresh flowers was placed on the mantel-piece ; and the last act of poor Margaret, when putting that morning various finishing touches to the room, had been to lay on the table a large Bible in clear type, with which she fondly hoped her father would solace his lonely hours.

"Well, father," said Gerald, as he glanced complacently round, "this looks very comfortable, I am happy to see ; this," throwing open the bedroom door, "is your sleeping room, you perceive, so you have a snug little domain quite apart from the people of the house."

"Yes, it looks comfortable," replied the old man, but there was a tone of reservation in his assent.

Gerald went on doing the honours. "Here," he observed, pulling out a drawer, where lay a row of nice white shirts, supplied by Margaret's care, "here is your linen."

"White shirts!" remarked the old man, "coloured would be more to the purpose ; white, unless it may be one for Sunday, cost a deal in the washing."

"Never you mind the washing," said his son, shortly, "that is not your concern."

"Ay! but, Jerry, I have had to think of the washing ; many's the day when I had no clean shirt unless I washed it myself in a water hole."

"Father," exclaimed Gerald, impatiently, "I have told

you before not to allude to those low times, they are past now ;” then checking himself, he resumed in a more respectful tone, after a moment’s pause, “ Well, father, I think you may be very comfortable here ; if anything has been omitted, let me know, and it shall be remedied. I have given orders to the people of the house to wait upon you properly, and you must keep them up to the mark ; if they show any negligence, complain at once to me ; you will tell them at what hour you choose to dine, I should think you will find seven most convenient.”

“ I have been thinking,” observed Mr Bright, “ that it would save a deal of trouble if I were just to take my meals below, with the people of the house.”

“ Never mind their trouble,” replied Gerald, “ that is what they are paid for.”

“ But it would be less lonesome for me,” added the old man, “ I should be glad of their company.”

“ But such company is the very thing we wish to avoid,” exclaimed his son ; “ and you will not be lonely at all, I shall come and see you nearly every day, and Margaret and Lu ”—— he hastily broke off the sentence, for he had not made up his mind whether or not he intended his wife to visit in that lodging, so he changed it into, “ Margaret will bring the children to see you.”

“ Now,” he observed, as he took up his hat, “ I don’t know that I can do anything more ; I shall order you a daily newspaper.”

“ Thankee, Gerald,” replied his father, with more animation than he had yet exhibited, “ I shall be glad of the sight of a paper ; and, as it is the same to you what

paper you order, I should like it to be the *People's Advocate*."

"The most blackguard paper that is printed," exclaimed Gerald. "No, I shall order you the *Sydney Herald*, it is a good paper, with right views on politics and everything; but now, father," he continued, "I have something to say before I go, so listen to me for a moment. I have set you up here like a gentleman, but it depends on yourself whether you retain the position." With this preface, he proceeded to give his father what we must call a tolerably long lecture, enjoining him to keep the position in which he was now placed, to avoid undue familiarity with the people of the house and other low company; warning him against indulgence in spirituous liquors, and smoking, at least in his apartments. Mr Bright listened to him with occasional impatient interruptions, but on the whole promised fair; and Gerald, who allowed himself to be blinded by his wishes, left him with the sanguine hope that all would now go smoothly.

Gerald's hesitation whether to allow his wife to call upon his father was decided for him, by Inda expressing her intention of doing so, quietly but quite decidedly; he thought it best, therefore, to acquiesce with a good grace; and Inda acted upon her resolution by going regularly every two or three days to see the old man. It was impossible they could have many subjects of conversation in common, but he was fond of talking of his son, not as he now was, but trying back upon his early days, and these reminiscences had, of course, an interest for Lucinda. He told her many anecdotes of her husband's boyhood, all in

his favour,—instances of courage, or generosity, and not unfrequently of affection towards himself. Over these last he lingered fondly ; and there was something touching in hearing the old man dwell on childish proofs of love in a son who seemed now to have little of such feeling remaining. Inda compassionated him sincerely, not that she thought lightly of his crime,—her pure and upright mind could not but shrink from the very thought of guilt such as his ; but she knew how to pity the sinner, and yet hate the sin. His sins had brought him nothing but degradation and misery, and she felt that he ought to be gently dealt with,—differently, that is, from the way in which his son treated him. It was curious to see this beautiful and refined young woman, the every lineament of whose face expressed something of inward purity and rectitude, sitting by the side of the aged convict, listening to his stories, and tending him with gentle, respectful kindness.

Margaret visited her father almost daily, and she ventured on more direct efforts to lead him to a right way of thinking. She read to him from the Bible, especially such passages as the parables of the prodigal and of the lost sheep, and she told him of a Saviour's love, and of the joy in heaven over a sinner that repenteth. Margaret had a very sweet and winning way in dealing with her father, and it seemed impossible he could resist the truths she placed before him. In fact, her exhortations might have met with a worse reception ; the old man's heart was not altogether like the barren ground, on which nothing can make any impression, though there were thorns and briars in sad numbers to choke the good seed. At times, his daughter would

venture to hope that he was really becoming the subject of converting grace ; at others, the power of his bad habits appeared so inveterate, that she felt the utmost discouragement. In these visits she often was accompanied by her children, of whom her father became extremely fond. Freddy was not implacable in his dislike, and proved particularly engaging to the old man. He would stand at his knee and beg to be told about the kangaroos in the bush, and sometimes would say, "Grand pa', you will make me a stock-whip some day, won't you ? and show me how to crack it." Such requests delighted old Bright ; he opened all his little budget of stories for the boy's amusement, and one of the chief pleasures of his life was the society of his grandchildren.

"Fred is like what Gerald was at his age," said he, as he stroked his grandson's curly head, "but he will grow up too, one of these days," and the old man drew a sigh.

In spite of the visits of this little circle, and those of his son, who looked in most days, if only for a few minutes, there were many hours in every day which Mr Bright had to spend alone ; and it was too much to expect that a man destitute of the resources of education, who read nothing beyond portions of the newspaper, would be contented to live thus, and not take to society of some kind. Gerald showed little knowledge of human nature when he supposed it possible. One day, as he ascended the stairs of his father's lodging, he heard strange voices and unmodulated laughter, and, on opening the door of the sitting-room, found himself in an atmosphere of tobacco smoke, reeking with the fumes of brandy and water. At the table sat his

father, in company with two or three other men, with pipes in their mouths and glasses before them, all of them in their shirt sleeves, and carousing together on the most intimate terms. Gerald stood still at the door, and surveyed this disgraceful scene with a stormy brow and curling lip.

"Come in, Jerry," said his father; "these are only a chum or two of mine who looked in to keep me company. I did not expect you at this hour."

"I supposed you did not," replied Gerald, who was at no pains to conceal his disgust; "I wish to speak to you, father, when you are alone, so I shall look in again presently." He turned on his heel and walked abruptly down stairs; he spent half-an-hour lounging about the adjacent streets to give the party time to break up, then returned to the lodging. There an unpleasant scene took place, of accusation on the one side, and defence on the other.

"I'll tell you what it is, Jerry," said Mr Bright, "I cannot live all alone, it is what I have never been used to; and I don't see why I am to be debarred seeing a friend in my own way."

Gerald felt the case was hopeless; he spoke, however, as severely as he could, and having made the old man thoroughly unhappy, took his leave.

As he walked homewards he met Mr Milner and Margaret taking their usual evening stroll; he joined them, and told them, not quite all that had happened, but enough to let them understand that the lodging plan was not answering.

The following morning Margaret called to see her father,

and found him low and dispirited. On her inquiring the cause, he replied, "Here's Gerald been scolding me for asking in a chum to sit with me for an hour ; he makes no allowance for the lonesomeness of my life ; but, as I told him, I have never been used to live alone, and the fact is, it is what I can't stand."

Margaret felt the case was very puzzling ; she could only soothe him as well as she was able ; and in the evening unburdened her mind in conversation with Mr Milner. "I don't see what can be done, Edmund," said she ; "there are, I feel, great allowances to be made for my father, and yet it is a dreadful thing to see him taking back to such habits and companions ; it is vain to hope to do him any good as long as he retains them. Sometimes he listens to me reading the Bible, and I think that an impression is made ; but any good he gains in this way is worse than lost among such associates."

Mr Milner sat thoughtfully silent ; at last he observed, "It no doubt is Gerald's duty to give his father a home ; but if he does not choose to do his duty, we cannot make him ; were it not for the children, he should live here."

Margaret looked up gratefully at her husband, and felt a sudden spark of hope. "Dear Edmund," said she, "I have never ventured to ask such a thing, scarcely even to wish it, for I know how disagreeable it would be to you."

"The disagreeable to myself is not what I am thinking of," replied Mr Milner ; "were that all, he should have been here long ago. I refused the hints Gerald gave upon the subject, solely from fear of injury to the children."

"I do not think," said Margaret, thoughtfully, "that the

children would get any harm ; of course I would watch them strictly, and not leave them alone together."

Mr Milner relapsed into silence. Margaret did not continue to urge her wishes, and in this she was wise ; after a few minutes her husband observed, " Well, we will give it a trial ; but remember," checking Margaret's ready expression of gratitude, " if on experiment we find it does not answer, you must not consider that I am breaking any promise in dissolving the arrangement."

Margaret, promised, saying, as she really felt, that her husband was good. And this strong sense of justice which actuated Mr Milner was, no doubt, a very valuable trait of character ; the only thing to be regretted was, that he did not always equally love mercy. Presently Margaret observed, " I do not understand Gerald, I am disappointed in him ; I always reckoned so much on his kindness of heart."

" I do not know where his kindness of heart is," replied Mr Milner ; " he is a selfish coxcomb !"

But Mr Milner could never indulge in a severe remark on Gerald, however true it might be, without raising an advocate in his favour. Margaret would not at this moment, when she felt so gratefully towards him, so much as look reproachfully ; but she brought forward some of her brother's merits as a set off to his faults.

" How well he behaved," she observed, " in giving up so much of his fortune to Mr Lancefield ; you, Edmund, admired him for that."

" No doubt," replied Mr Milner, " that was a fine thing ; but there are people capable of performing an exceptional

fine action, who yet fail in the more ordinary duties of life ; they act on impulse, not on principle, and without principle no character can be worth much."

After this little digression, they resumed speaking of the arrangements for the reception of Mr Bright ; and thus it was that Margaret's convict father became an inmate of Mr Milner's cottage.

CHAPTER XV.

"If the bank is forced to make this call on the shareholders that is spoken of, I shall become liable for thirty thousand pounds; in that case we shall have to leave Westleigh; perhaps to sell it—certainly to let it."

This remark was made by Mr Towers at a time when the newspapers and men's mouths were full of the failure of a certain bank, which for upwards of a quarter of a century had stood high, but, owing in part to extensive frauds practised upon it, partly in consequence of a general commercial panic, had stopped payment. It was a fearful time for many, whether the *all* that in some cases was lost was much or little, whether it was a single lady—a poor governess, who lost her few hundreds, her little savings, or a mercantile firm that became insolvent for thousands. It was said that the depositors would ultimately get their money, and from the day of the first ill rumours the bank doors were besieged by persons impatient to withdraw their deposits; but their claims could only be met by the liability of the shareholders, who had already paid up considerable sums, and to-day announcement was made of an extra call, which on many of those involved could entail little less than ruin.

There were sad homes that night, and one is very much

a picture of others. Mr Towers sat in his drawing-room with his family around him; he held, unfortunately for him, a great number of shares, and the demand that fell upon him was consequently very heavy.

"Well," said he, "I have had a great deal of prosperity in my life, and all things are liable to change; I have no right to grumble that I have my turn of adversity."

"It is hard, Nicholas," observed his wife, who grieved for him while she was brave for herself, "that without any fault of yours the hard-earned savings of years should go in a day."

"There are others worse off, we must remember," was his reply; "there are people who lose as much without being able to work; besides, we have much to be thankful for, so long as we all are spared to be together; there are worse losses than that of money, children," he continued, looking round on the grave young faces that encircled him, "while there are no blanks in our family we can never be very unhappy."

Thus did Mr Towers teach his children how a misfortune of this kind is to be borne. Some of the boys spoke vindictively of the bank directors, to whom considerable blame attached, remarking that it was a comfort to know that they would suffer at least as much as any one; but this spirit Mr Towers checked instantly.

In the corner of a sofa, a little drawn back from the others, Lydia sat with Charles Lancefield beside her, who, in this hour of domestic trial, was as much one of the family as he had hitherto been in its joys. They were both very silent, until Mr Towers, glancing towards them, said

in a tone of forced badinage, "You will have to take a penniless wife after all, Lancefield; it is not what I thought or intended, but it looks very like it."

Charles took the hand of his betrothed and held it in his. "Give me Lydia, sir," said he, "that is all I ask."

Nevertheless, a foreboding pressed upon his mind that this impending calamity might in some way, as yet undefined, separate him and his love; and while taking a son's share in Mr Towers' troubles, this selfish fear made him hold Lydia's hand fast, as though he dreaded her escaping from him; even while she sat by him on the sofa, he had the feeling that night that she was less securely his bride than he had believed for the last some weeks.

The young people could hardly take in the fact that they might have to leave Westleigh; they remembered no other home, and the associations of a happy childhood and youth were all entwined with the spot; they loved the house, the flowers, the lawns; the children loved the "sunset tree," where they were wont to gather of an evening, and Lydia loved the orange grove where she often walked with her lover. They looked round the drawing-room, that large and pretty room, and could not bear to think that the familiar furniture must be in great part sold, or left to the tender mercy of strangers, for a small town house could not take in the half of it. The elder boys and girls, indeed, taking example by their parents, stifled heroically the expression of their regrets, but the unrestrained lamentations of the children were in fact the utterance of the feelings of the whole party. Pillows were wetted with some bitter tears that night.

Things turned out quite as badly as Mr Towers had anticipated, and every possible reduction in living became necessary. Westleigh was advertised to let, and a house, no larger than was necessary to accommodate the family, taken in a street in Sydney.

It was a sad time for all while the arrangements for leaving were in progress; and in the sale of many things, the packing and removal of others, one link after another seemed severed between them and their late happy and beautiful home. But the extent of the calamity once evident, no weak repinings were heard, every one put his or her shoulder to the wheel, and even the little children quickly learnt that they must not ask for new frocks or play-things, because "poor papa was not so rich as he had been."

But the member of the family on whom—if we except Mr Towers himself—the change of fortune fell hardest was Lydia; her marriage day was fixed, her trousseau almost completed, but she now told Charles that she could not leave her parents at a time when she might be so useful to them, reminding him, with a smile, that she had waited a good while for him, so it was only just that he should wait for her; nor could Charles, vexed and disappointed as he was, object to a delay of which his own right feeling told him the propriety. It did however strike him that his happiness was like the mirage which we see on the scorching plains of this country—it ever receded as he seemed to approach most near. He made this desponding comparison to Lydia, who replied, "Happiness must not be the object we pursue; our object is to do our duty, and that lies very close at hand, we can grasp it if we will."

The day arrived for leaving Westleigh. Mr Towers having despatched his family to their new residence, remained behind a few hours alone to complete some arrangements, for a tenant had not yet offered. It would be impossible to say, now that the final moment had come, that he could leave the place without strong regret, Christian philosopher though he was ; and as he paid farewell visits to the greenhouses he had built, to the grounds he had had so much pleasure in laying out, then ranged his eye over the more distant orange groves which he had planted, he wondered what stranger was destined to reap the fruit of his exertions. While he was speculating on this subject, and returning towards the house, after giving a last look at everything, a carriage appeared in the avenue, occupied by a gentleman and two ladies. At first he supposed them strangers, but in a moment recognised Mr Pryn, his daughter, and sister. It was not surprising that Mr Towers, who was short-sighted without this spectacles, did not at the first glance recognise them ; for recalling, as he could not fail of doing, the last visit which Mr Pryn had paid at Westleigh, when, travel-soiled and on foot he called to solicit a little pecuniary assistance, the present appearance of the party was a great contrast. The ladies were both very gaily dressed, Mr Pryn himself had quite a spruce and jaunty air, and the vehicle in which they drove up to the door was a handsome new phaeton. They alighted in the veranda, where Mr Towers, though wondering in his heart what brought them, received them with the easy civility he showed to every one. He was hardly prepared for the words with which Mr Pryn fol-

lowed up his first salutation. "I heard that this place is to let, Towers; so as I have a desire for country quarters myself, I thought it might perhaps suit me."

The world had gone well with Mr Pryn since we last saw him; the command of money which he obtained by his partnership was sufficient to enable him to indulge his love of speculation; for a bold and restless spirit of enterprise was too congenial to the disposition of Gerald himself for him to throw any obstacles in the way. They had therefore by no means adhered exclusively to the tame safe path of their agency business, but had embarked in various ventures of their own, and these capricious fortune had favoured far more than even they had expected. One or two successful strokes had put, within a very short time, a great deal of money into their pockets, and a consciousness of this gave self-importance to the manner of Mr Pryn; a consciousness also that fortune was at present proportionably adverse to his neighbour, accounted for the tone of patronising familiarity with which he addressed Mr Towers. There are generous natures whom the misfortunes of a rival immediately divest of every bitter feeling, but such was not Mr Pryn's. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him," was not likely to be his motto; but rather, "If thine enemy is down, hit him hard." Accordingly there was in his manner an almost studied assumption which could not fail of being offensive to Mr Towers.

That gentleman, stifling any reluctance he may have felt in the prospect of Mr Pryn as a tenant, expressed his willingness to show him the house and grounds, and proceeded to conduct him himself, in the first place, over the latter.

Gardens, vinery, greenhouses, were successively visited. Mr Pryn abstained from admiring anything, but treated all he saw with a careless approval. The greenhouses were in high beauty ; ranges of delicate blossoms rose tier above tier, showing by their rich profusion how carefully, and even fondly, they had been cherished. Mr Towers was in his element among them ; he did not allow his guests to pass through with the cursory glance that sufficed for other things, but could not refrain from pausing oft, to draw attention to the beauties or peculiarities of one and another. Much curious botanical information, as well as many practical hints on the treatment of plants, were imparted by him with the zeal and enthusiasm of a true lover of his subject.

Mr Pryn during the lecture on botany showed visible signs of impatience, and seemed only anxious to get on. "When once old Towers mounts on his hobby, there is no getting him off," he muttered to his sister. But Emily listened throughout with intelligent interest, and at last ventured to observe, "What a pity it is, sir, that you, who know so much about flowers, and are so fond of them, should have to leave them all." Mr Towers hesitated for a moment, then said, frankly, "Well, I do regret it; but there is one lesson, my dear young lady, which we all must learn sooner or later to say, 'Not my will, but Thine be done.'"

"As fond of preaching as ever, Towers," remarked Mr Pryn ; "but I don't want any gloomy, religious ideas put into her head." Mr Towers answered by only a sad smile ; the other went on abruptly as if determined to change the

subject. "Well, I see no reason why this place should not suit me; what do say, Emmy, don't you think we shall do very well here?"

"I think, papa, we shall not know what to do with so many fine things."

"Emily, you foolish girl," exclaimed her father, frowning sourly at her.

"You will soon accommodate yourself, Miss Emily," observed Mr Towers, mildly, "we must accustom ourselves to expect changes in this world; your change has been for the better, mine for the worse."

"But I hope, sir, you may come back soon," said Emily, looking up in his face and blushing, in the fear of being impertinent.

"That is impossible to say."

"Every dog has his day, eh, Towers?" remarked Mr Pryn, who looked as if he by no means echoed his daughter's wish; "you have had yours, and a pretty long day it has been; it is time mine should begin now." And he chuckled as he spoke.

From the gardens they went into the house; and there Miss Rubina made herself as disagreeable in her way as her brother had done in his out of doors. She pulled up the covers of the furniture, pointed out the smallest blemish in any article, and showed altogether so keen an eye to the interest of the incoming tenant, as made Mr Towers smile to himself, and, in subsequent conversation with his wife, pronounce Miss Rubina a "nipper." As however there was on one side, at any rate, a sincere desire to oblige and accommodate, and on the other a strong wish to take the

place, it was not difficult to come to an arrangement; and the result of the visit was that Pryn agreed to take Westleigh for a lease of seven years.

At last the party drove away, leaving Mr Towers standing on the steps of the veranda, from whence he looked after the retreating carriage. "Well," said he mentally, "a tenant is a tenant, his money is as good as another's, and, to do him justice, he made no difficulty about the rent."

With which reflection he started down the avenue, and proceeded on foot into Sydney.

Of Mr Pryn it is not uncharitable to say, that his pleasure in the prospect of so agreeable a residence was enhanced by the fact, that he was stepping into the very shoes of a man who for long had been to him an object of envy and dislike.

It was a great change to Mr Towers's family to find themselves restricted to a limited town residence, where rooms were small, and a back green their only substitute for the broad lawns and shady walks to which they had been accustomed. To make matters worse, Mrs Towers fell into a very precarious state of health, so that at the very time when a reduced income increased the burden of her domestic duties, she was less than usually capable of any exertion. Then Lydia felt convinced beyond a doubt that she had acted rightly in postponing her marriage. More useful even than she had expected, she proved to her father and mother: the latter she relieved of all the cares of housekeeping; she saved her father the expense of a governess, by carrying on the education of her sisters

herself ; and in addition to all this, did a great part of the family needlework. Were we to describe all that this girl got through in the twenty-four hours it would seem more than one head and pair of hands could accomplish ; but order and regularity, as Miss Towers proved, will do wonders. In these busy days Lydia had no leisure to pursue on her own account the accomplishments of which she was so fond, and in which she excelled ; but she took cheerfully the burden of her tasks, and after spending a morning in the schoolroom, correcting exercises and listening to the little girls reading their Grecian or Roman history, would sometimes say, laughingly, " It is really very improving to go through one's education a second time as I am doing. You had better be careful, Charles, how you venture to refer to any facts of ancient history, for I am hot off the irons, and shall be sure to detect any mistakes."

CHAPTER XVI.

For a time Mr Pryn revelled in the beautiful place he had taken, and he seemed to find a pleasure in acting and talking in a way that must mortify the real owners. All the respectable old servants, who had been at Westleigh nearly as long as Mr Towers himself, and whose attachment resembled that occasionally seen in the servants on hereditary property at home, and which is rarely met with amid the changes and chances of a colony, he turned off as his first step, filling their places with others of his own selection who would not regret the former family. As is not an uncommon error in persons who have very suddenly risen to the command of wealth, he gathered around him a profusion and excess of luxury ; and the ostentatious tone in which he spoke of "my vinery, my conservatory," would have led any stranger to suppose the property was his own, and all the merit of the improvements his. His children were surrounded by attendants, and his daughter was brought forward in a way as unbefitting her age, as likely to be injurious to her character ; always carefully dressed, instructed in every showy accomplishment, and flattered both by her father and by the promiscuous company he brought to the house, everything was done to fill this child with pride and self-conceit, and teach her to forget the

salutary lessons she had learned under the discipline of poverty.

In all this display and extravagance Miss Rubina Pryn could hardly be called a participator, for she was at no pains to conceal the disapprobation with which she viewed it; and more than once she spoke to her brother of the imprudence of spending his income as fast as he made it, instead of laying by for a rainy day. But it was not a mind elated by the sunshine of present prosperity that was likely to give heed to such advice; in the same proportion as he had been depressed by his ill-fortune was the reaction now; and as he then had believed he was doomed to have nothing go right with him, he now thought there never again could come a reverse.

One day he offered his sister a present of a set of ornaments, which she mortified him by rejecting; it was not that she despised the gift, for she liked to be handsomely dressed, nor did she doubt that he could afford the purchase on the day he made it, but she did not choose to become a party to his careless expenditure; and if, she significantly thought, she placed herself under obligations to George by the acceptance of rich presents, he and his family would have a claim on her fortune when their own was all gone. Thus did this shrewd, though selfish lady, discern the probable end of the career along which they were hastening, which her brother with all his ability did not foresee.

In each fresh outlay it was not alone the indulgence of his own taste, but a petty wish to compete with and triumph over the Towers which spurred him on; and he

let escape no opportunity of making them feel how the turning of the wheel of fortune had altered their relative positions. To a man ingenious in the art of wounding others, and of implying insults, occasions of gratifying his malice could not be wanting. One day he accompanied his family to a church, where, the organist happening to be unwell, Miss Towers had good-naturedly volunteered to take his place for a few Sundays, that the congregation might not suffer from his absence. Mr Pryn returned home much struck by her performance; and the following day Lydia received a note stating, that as she had accepted the situation of organist at St ——'s, he supposed she would also be glad to give private lessons in music, in which case he was willing to engage her to instruct his daughter; and, money being no object to him, she might name her own terms.

It was very seldom that the least amiable feelings of our nature had been so thoroughly roused in Lydia's breast as on this occasion. That the proposal was made to her as a wanton and intentional insult she could not doubt, and in very natural indignation she sat down to answer it by a rejection as brief as it deserved. But her fine temper was too much the effect of principle as well as of disposition to be seriously ruffled by the offence of another, and before her own note was sealed she had grown sufficiently cool to question whether so cold and haughty a reply did not betray a failure of temper on her part, as much as there was on his a want of delicacy and consideration. She took one or two turns up and down the room, then tore her own note into fragments and again sat down to her desk, to

write a fresh refusal, far more gently expressed. But as she placed a sheet of paper before her, and was about to dip her pen into the ink, she suddenly paused, as if a new idea had struck her, and for the next some minutes she sat in serious thought. From hints which her father had dropped in his family, Lydia was aware that he was at present hard pressed for money, and it now occurred to her that by giving Emily Pryn music lessons she might add a trifle to the common stock. She could, of course, take no step in the matter without consulting her parents, and Mr Towers had gone to his office, her mother too had retired to her room with a severe headache, and Lydia would not disturb her; so having set her sisters to their lessons, she went about some of her other occupations.

She was alone in the drawing-room reading, when Charles Lancefield looked in to spend half an hour with her. Now that she lived so near to the scene of his daily work, he was often able to look in, if only for a few minutes at a time, and very pleasant to them both were these brief visits.

They sat together on a sofa, and Charles took up the book she had in her hand when he entered; but he laid it down again carelessly, saying, "One of the boys' books." It was a Latin grammar.

"One of the boys' books," repeated Lydia, "but mine at present; and I am come to a difficulty, Charles, in which you must help me."

"Lydia," said Charles, "you are not learning Latin?"

Lydia nodded. "Do you disapprove of women learning Latin?"

"I approve, in general, of a woman learning anything for which she has a taste, though I do think that the modern languages offer more to a lady; but at present, it seems to me, you have more than enough on your hands as it is, without taxing yourself with any new study."

"For pleasure I would not have done so," replied Lydia; "but the truth is, that I am studying Latin in order to teach little Oswald. It was intended that he should go to school this spring; but poor papa is, I know, hard pressed at present, so I thought I could manage to educate him for a year or two with his sisters."

The look of approbation which Charles involuntarily bestowed upon Lydia was very pleasant to her; nevertheless he replied, "Lydia, this will not do; you educate your sisters, you keep house for your mother, you sew for your father and brothers; and if, in addition to all this, you are to tax your mind with learning Latin to teach Oswald, your own health will give way. You are like the high-mettled racehorse," he added, with a smile, "that exerts his strength until he breaks down."

"There is no fear of my breaking down," said Lydia. "I am very well." But even while she spoke, the uncertain flicker of her colour seemed to give grounds for Charles's fear.

"I don't think you are," said he, seriously; "you look more delicate than you did six months ago."

"You will make me nervous if you look at me in that way," said Lydia, laughing, as she half turned away from her lover's anxious gaze. "And what can I do? I cannot

let Oswald take his place among other boys to a disadvantage when he does go to school."

Charles was silent.

"I have a little plan in my head," continued Lydia; "it would not pay for Oswald's school, but it would do something towards it, and I want to hear what you think of it." She placed Mr Pryn's note in his hand, and not wishing to prejudice him one way or the other, said simply, "What do you think of that?"

As Charles Lancefield read, his face assumed an expression of supercilious displeasure. "I think," he exclaimed, "that there is but one answer to be returned—a cold, even haughty, refusal."

"Ah," replied Lydia, laughing, "how like we are in our faults, Charles; that was my first impulse also, but I have since seen it was not the right one."

"I don't see that at all," he observed. "Impertinent upstart!"

"But perhaps he did not mean it as an insult," said Lydia; "we have no right to take it for granted that he did; and, at any rate, his faults cannot excuse us for being angry and unforbearing; but what I want is, your approbation, not of my refusal, but for my accepting the proposal."

But Charles would give his approbation to no such thing; he had very proud, sensitive feelings, and the pride which his early education had fostered, not all the rubs he had since met with in the world, or even a religious sense of its sinfulness, had ever been able wholly to subdue, and it now rose in rebellion against Miss Towers's suggestion

"Do you ask my advice, Lydia?" he asked, after a rather painful silence.

"Why, not your advice exactly; but I knew you might not like it, and I would not willingly do anything to vex you, at least without speaking it over."

"Well, I confess," said Charles, "it may be pride; but I cannot bear the idea of your turning your acquirements to pecuniary account, and receiving the money of strangers."

"You mean you cannot bear the thought of your wife doing so," said Lydia, hastily.

"That is hitting me very hard, Lydia," replied he; "for on no other grounds could I have a right even to express an opinion; but are you sure that you know your own mind?"

"Yes," said Lydia. "I should like to do this for papa; but I am not unpersuadable, and since you do not approve of it, I will drop the idea."

"Thank you, dearest," said Charles; "you cannot tell how much it would have gone against my feelings to see you hire out your talents in the service of such a man as Pryn, when your family are not in circumstances to make it a duty; were it necessary, I should of course honour you for laying aside your own pride. But now to return to the Latin; hear my plan, Lydia; let me be Oswald's tutor."

"You!" repeated Lydia. "A great lawyer, getting every day into more repute! I think I see you turning tutor to a little boy. I wonder where the time would come from, if that were all?"

"I can make the time," replied Charles. "I generally

take an hour in the evening for amusing reading, and I shall willingly give that up to be of use to your brother. If Mr Towers will consent to Oswald coming to my rooms at that time, I think I shall be able to bring him on."

"You do not half know what you are undertaking," said Lydia, who looked, however, greatly pleased. "Oswald is a very good boy, but teaching even the best of children is a great deal of trouble."

"I hope I do not overestimate my own temper and patience," said Charles, smiling, "but I believe that both are equal to the task; I should really like to do this, so we will appeal to Mr Towers, and I trust to you, Lydia, to gain his consent."

The question was referred to Mr Towers, and at first was answered by the same objections as Lydia had brought forward; but Charles was so evidently sincere in his offer, that it finally was accepted, with as much cordiality as it was made.

And a most efficient tutor was Charles, as the progress of his pupil testified; and whether the merit was due to him or Oswald, it is certain that when, at the end of a year, the latter went to school, he took his place with, to say the least, no disadvantage among other boys. Sometimes Mrs Towers would say, "Really, Mrs Lancefield, you are giving up too much time to Oswald; I am sure I hope we are all very grateful to you." But such apologies he always checked by remarking, gently, "I think, Mrs Towers, it is not any of this family who should speak of gratitude to me."

CHAPTER XVII.

CHARLES'S remark that Lydia looked more delicate than six months before, was not without foundation ; shortly after the above conversation, both Mr and Mrs Towers were struck with symptoms of declining strength in their daughter, which the quick eye of her lover had been the first to detect. Without appearing to have any definite complaint, she grew pale and thin, her step grew languid, and soon it became evident, to their great grief, that their daughter, who was their right hand and their treasure, was fading away before them. A medical man was called in without loss of time, and at once pronounced that in mind and body alike she had been overtasked, and that an interval of entire rest was indispensable. In accordance with the physician's orders, backed up by the injunctions of her parents, Lydia relinquished the greater part of her self-imposed duties, Mrs Towers made an effort and resumed the housekeeping, and a daily governess was engaged for the little girls. But in the present state of the family real rest was very difficult for Lydia to obtain. Sometimes she would lie down on the sofa, as recommended, with a piece of light needle-work, or an amusing book, with which to recreate without taxing her mind, and intend to be quite quiet, when her mother would enter with some trouble-

some piece of housekeeping on hand, of which Lydia thought she could relieve her, and in a moment she was off the sofa, insisting on helping her; then the children were crowding round her constantly with petitions, "Lydia, help me to this, or tell me that." And as long as there was anything to be done for others, Lydia would not spare herself. Mr Towers decided that the only thing would be to give her a little entire change, and that she might not suppose the arrangement was made solely on her account, he declared his intention of taking a little holiday and spending a fortnight in the country, whither Lydia must accompany him. The doctor whom they consulted was a friend as well as an adviser, and when the proposed tour was mentioned to him, he replied, "The very thing! Change of air is worth all my drugs. Better spend your money on country lodgings than on apothecaries' bills."

There are about Sydney, or were a few years ago, very few places where any person wishing to spend a few weeks from home can resort; none of the watering-places, or seaside lodgings, such as offer facilities in England; but Illawarra is a pretty place, easy of access, and thither Mr Towers decided to take Lydia. He proposed to engage rooms at a hotel; and the distance was not so great, but that, if needful, he might run up once or twice to Sydney to attend to his business. He would leave his cares behind him, he said, as Lydia was to leave hers, and they would spend nearly all their time out of doors exploring the scenery. Lydia was delighted with the prospect of being her father's companion, and gleefully mentioned the plan to her friend Lucinda. Inda had as yet seen nothing of the neighbour-

hood of Sydney, beyond such as lay within the range of a ride or drive; and Gerald, who happened to be present, immediately exclaimed, "The very thing for us! Why might we not join parties?" Mr Towers threw no obstacle in the way of this proposal; he was inclined, from the little he knew of him, to think very well of Gerald, and was aware that it would be a pleasure to the ladies to be together. He did not, however, bargain for quite all he got.

"I have invited Pryn to join us," said Gerald, as he entered the drawing-room, (accommodation having by then been written for to the hotel at Wollongong,*) "he and his daughter are to accompany us."

"Dear Gerald," said Lucinda, "surely that was inconsiderate; it cannot be very pleasant for Mr Towers to meet Mr Pryn."

"By Jove! I never thought of that," replied Gerald, who was heedless as any schoolboy; "well, it can't be helped now. I confess I shall be glad of my partner's company, and Emily Pryn will be a nice little companion for you and Miss Towers."

It was too late for Mr Towers to withdraw, had he desired to do so, and when his wife remarked, "It will be disagreeable to you being associated in this way with Mr Pryn," he replied, "I have no feeling against the man. I think he has behaved extremely ill, but I shall have no difficulty in treating him civilly. My chief objection to having him of the party is, that he is such a firebrand, that I feel sure he will not allow us to be under the same roof without contriving to pick some quarrel."

* The township of Illawarra.

Gerald and Lucinda were seated with Mr Pryn and his daughter on board the Wollongong steamer, which sailed in the morning, and usually reached its destination early in the evening of the same day. They awaited Mr and Miss Towers to complete their party; Inda was speaking to Emily, but when Lydia appeared at the other end of the deck, she broke off her conversation, and with an expression of pleasure at the arrival of her friend, went forward to meet her. Gerald followed his wife, leaving Mr Pryn and Emily sitting alone; and as no similar attention had been shown to them on arrival, his jealous temper took offence.

"Now mind," said he to his daughter, "no nonsense to Miss Towers, no kissing, or nonsense of that kind; know your own position, child, which is far superior to hers. That is a very pretty frock you have got on, Emmy, and you are looking very well; we'll pull her down a peg, or I am mistaken."

While her father uttered these disjointed sentences, Emily's colour rose painfully; but the approach of Miss Towers prevented her answering. Lydia came forward, speaking cheerfully to Inda; and hers being a disposition which did not retain a feeling of past offences, she spoke civilly to Mr Pryn, and kindly to Emily. But the effect of her father's remarks was to render Emily awkward and constrained, and her embarrassed answer to Miss Towers's greeting, had all the appearance of want of cordiality. Lydia turned from her with a feeling of disappointment; she had hoped better things of Emily, and as she took a seat apart by Lucinda, indulged in the philosophical reflection, how much easier it is to bear well adversity than

prosperity ; how few are proof against a great rise in fortune. In this case her conclusion was not quite correct.

They landed about five o'clock, and the ladies soon separated to their different apartments to rest, and prepare for dinner. Lydia was rather fatigued, but felt that she must exert herself and get her trunk unpacked. She had just commenced operations, when a gentle tap came at the door, and on opening it she found Emily Pryn before her.

"I came to see," said Emily, "if you will let me unpack for you, as I think you have not brought a maid ; and will you let me help you to dress ?"

"Certainly not ; I am much obliged to you," replied Lydia.

"I never can forget how kind you were to me," pursued Emily, "and the grapes, and other things you gave me ; I wish you would let me help you."

As she made her blushing request, she looked, in spite of her fine frock, so entirely the simple ingenuous child, to whom once, when tired and shabby, Miss Towers had been a benefactress, that Lydia understood the whole thing ; she comprehended that Emily had been tutored by her father, and thence her constraint of manner at their meeting.

"Come in, my dear, if you like," said she, opening the door wider, "though I do not require any assistance."

Emily entered, and was not officious in her offers of service, but ventured to remark, "Mrs Bright says that you are not very well ; I think you might let me arrange those things for you, while you sit in that great chair."

Lydia knew too well the pleasure to a generous mind of

repaying a kindness to refuse this gratification altogether to Emily, and she allowed her to do some little things for her ; though, aware of Mr Pryn's peculiar disposition, and that he might talk, no saying what nonsense, about making a waiting-maid of his daughter, not so much as Emily would have liked.

The little girl seemed to have something she wished to say, and at last, while kneeling on the floor, regardless of her fine dress, to take some articles out of the trunk, she observed, " It all seems so unnatural ; Miss Towers, I never can feel at home at Westleigh, I always think that you ought to be there, and that we are only interlopers."

The barrier was now entirely broken down between her and her friend, and, the unpacking being concluded, they sat together and talked, with mutual satisfaction and pleasure, until summoned to dinner.

Lydia had none of that morbid feeling which would make her averse to hear of her former home from strangers she might have shrunk from questioning Mr Pryn, but she liked to hear about all her old belongings, as related in Emily's full, unassuming, childish way. She asked after individual trees and plants, and felt quite touched and grateful when Emily mentioned that she and her brothers were trying to keep in order certain small patches of ground which they had found in a retired part of the shrubbery, and were sure had been the gardens of Miss Towers's little sisters, as some day, perhaps, the children might return, and would be pleased to find their gardens had not been neglected. Lydia gave Emily a kiss upon this, and felt that, though Mr Pryn's daughter, she was a

truly amiable girl. Then Lydia listened to stories about her old pets, the Kangaroo dogs, which were wont to lie about the door at Westleigh, and to which Emily, as she related, daily carried choice morsels from the breakfast table, without, however, she confessed, winning much affection from those handsome, though phlegmatic animals.

Nor did Miss Towers, while encouraging this little girl to chatter to her, omit to throw in some well-timed remarks on the responsibilities of those who are rich in this world ; and Emily's face grew more earnest, as Lydia spoke of the sick and the destitute who have claims, and pointed out that it is a duty, not only to relieve misfortune when it comes before us, but to seek it out in order to relieve. Many a good and new idea did she contrive, in the course of this apparently light conversation, to suggest ; hints which might safely be left to Emily's own thoughtful mind to work out.

The party reassembled to a bush-dinner, dinner that is, accompanied by tea. The house, dignified with the name of hotel, and in which the influx of so many guests left little spare accommodation, was simplicity itself, both in its outward structure and internal arrangements ; but it was clean and comfortable, and the variety from their usual mode of life was acceptable, rather than otherwise, to those of the party who had never been beyond reach of the refinements of Sydney. Mr Pryn alone, in the pride of his newly-acquired wealth, made some grumbling remarks on the inconvenience of doing without certain things ; but added, condescendingly, that it is quite possible to put up, for a short time, with the want of the elegancies to which one is used.

"I hoped things would have been rather rougher than they are," observed Inda; "I thought we were to have been really in the bush."

"You were prepared, I believe, to drink tea out of a tin pint," remarked Gerald, with a smile.

"Not quite; but I did hope we should have had a damper."

"Have you never seen a damper, Mrs Bright?" asked Mr Towers.

"No," replied Inda, "and I have a great curiosity to see one."

"You must make interest with our hostess, I daresay she will oblige you; that is just the kind of hearth on which they bake them in the ashes,"—and he pointed to the wide, open fireplace, containing no grate, but intended for the reception of logs. "In the meantime, let me give you a wing of this wonga-wonga, which, I think you will confess, is as much better, as it is larger, than that of an English pigeon."

"I remember," observed Mr Pryn, "in my first, or rather only journey in the bush, how tired I was of the perpetual damper, tea, and beef, which was presented to me three times a day; but we are here not sufficiently remote for Mrs Bright to have opportunity of roughing it, as she seems to wish."

Gerald had brought his own and his wife's horse, and in the long rides which they daily took, Inda got some little insight into bush life. She saw groups of aborigines, slab-built, shingle-roofed huts, besides a variety of beautiful scenery, and flowers and trees before unknown to her.

Among the latter was the cabbage-tree palm, from the leaves of which the hats are made ; and she returned from her first day's ride with her hat twined with a wreath of passion flowers, which Gerald had gathered for her.

Mr Towers and his daughter had no such way of getting about, and contented themselves, for the most part, with pedestrian expeditions ; and Emily followed Lydia like her shadow.

In Lucinda's opinion, Mr Pryn was not an acquisition to the party ; he took her husband a good deal from her, and engrossed him more than sufficiently in business conversations. " You seem to me to be always thinking of business, Mr Pryn," she remarked, one day ; " you will not allow Gerald to have a holiday."

To which he replied, " I'll tell you what it is, Mrs Bright, if a man is to do any good in his business, he must think of it pretty nearly always."

" But money is called ' the root of all evil,' " said Inda.

" I have found the want of it the ' root ' of a good deal," he replied.

Inda had greater reason than she was for some time aware of to regret the presence of Mr Pryn ; since not alone by unseasonable reference to business, but in many matters of an almost strictly private nature, did he contrive to interfere between herself and Gerald ; for such was her husband's infatuation about this man, that he made no secret of any of his affairs to him. Every evening, after dinner, Gerald retired for a short time to smoke a cigar ; Mr Pryn, though no smoker, usually accompanied him, and in these twilight loiterings the conversation took often

a more confidential tone than Inda would have at all approved. Nor was Pryn, in any way, a safe or desirable confidant.

At this time Lucinda had a legacy left her of one thousand pounds. It was settled on herself ; but Gerald wished her to make it over to him, to invest in the business. To this she objected, saying that she thought it rash to invest everything they possessed in a speculative business. That evening, as Gerald and Pryn sat together in the veranda, the former mentioned this bequest to his wife. "It has come at the very nick of time," observed Pryn, in reply ; "we were in want of a little ready money, and this coming to hand will put us square for the present."

"But she will not let us have it," observed Gerald ; "my wife has a pious horror of speculation. I believe she thinks that we shall end by being ruined."

"Ah!" said Pryn, coldly, "it is a mistake in my opinion to talk of business to ladies ; I never discussed my affairs with the late lamented Mrs Pryn." Gerald thought that his affairs had not flourished so much in those days that he need boast of how they were managed.

"But," resumed Pryn, "you must contrive to get this money from Mrs Bright ; and I never met with the woman yet, who loved her husband, and could persevere in a refusal." Gerald had a suspicion that it might not be so easy to shake Lucinda's resolution ; this insinuation, however, nettled him, and made him resolve, if possible, to obtain the money.

On the first opportunity he resumed the subject with

Lucinda, all his pride being enlisted to carry his point. But Lucinda was what he called very obstinate.

"I have made up my mind," said she, "what I wish done with the money. Mr Towers has been telling me of what he considers a very safe investment: there is some land to be sold as building allotments near Sydney, and if the town stretches out in that direction, as seems likely, they must very much rise in value; surely, dear Gerald, it is very much for the interest of us both to have something in reserve, and not to have all we possess involved in the same concern."

Gerald could not but feel that she was right, and was half disposed to fall in with her views; but when he reported the result of this conversation to Mr Pryn, that gentleman assumed a very sardonic expression of face. "Mr Towers!" he repeated, "and do you like your wife to be guided by Mr Towers rather than by you?"

"Towers has had a great deal of experience," answered Gerald, "and his advice is likely to be sound."

"That is not the way women argue, Bright," observed Pryn; "they are influenced by those whom they prefer." Gerald's face reddened to the brow.

"It is time, in my opinion," resumed the other, "for Mrs Towers to come and look after her husband, to see that he does not get into mischief; you, I suppose, can keep your own eyes open."

"Pryn, what nonsense!" Gerald began.

It was needless for Mr Pryn to say more; as much of the poison as he could wish to insinuate had taken effect.

The two gentlemen were sitting together at this time over their wine, lingering at the dinner-table after the rest of the party had dispersed.

"Talking of Towers," observed Pryn, changing the conversation with negligent ease, "I should like to know what he spent when he lived at Westleigh. It is a tremendously expensive place to keep up; you don't live there for nothing, I can tell you."

"I daresay not," answered Gerald, abstractedly.

"Take, now, the garden, for example; it is impossible to consume in the family the fruit it produces, and I was told that in Towers's time it almost paid itself, and that the Westleigh oranges were esteemed about the best in the market; so I send in large quantities to Sydney, but I always get a Flemish account of the price."

"Very likely, unless you know how to manage that kind of thing," answered Gerald, who suspected that Pryn, in becoming tenant of Westleigh, had undertaken more than he was fit for.

"I know as well as another," was the reply; "but colonial servants are such rogues. Only the other day the gardener told me that oranges were selling at so much per basket; and as I came into town it occurred to me to inquire at the market, and I found he had told me quite a false figure. Those convict fellows there is no trusting!" Here Mr Pryn, struck with the awkwardness of the last words as addressed to Gerald, stopped abruptly. "Do you have great plague with your stable?" he asked, after a moment's silence.

"Not particularly. Why?"

"I don't think the air out where I am agrees with horses."

Gerald laughed.

"It is quite true; they are always getting sick, and just when I want them most, they are sure to be unfit for use. You know that pair of carriage horses I bought lately—fine high-steppers? Well, they have turned ill, and in spite of the enormous quantity of corn and other things they consume, get thinner and thinner."

"That ought to be looked into," exclaimed Gerald.

"So it is; I flatter myself that I know as much about a horse as any man; but it is very provoking, for one of my best horses died lately. Those animals are very liable to disease."

"Well, I don't know," said Gerald; "my horses never get thin and die," and he repressed a rather significant smile.

"Oh, it is no uncommon thing for a horse to pine in that way."

"I daresay it is not, under peculiar circumstances," said Gerald.

"My coachman assures me that there is a well-known complaint, in which a horse, while eating his head off, grows a living skeleton, and dies with every appearance of starvation."

Mr Pryn, we thus see, was proving that property brings its cares; there was the crumpled rose-leaf even in his new-found prosperity. But Gerald was not interested in the dialogue. Though able to give answers tolerably to the purpose, his thoughts were running on his partner's

previous remarks ; and as Pryn ceased speaking, he rose abruptly from table, left the room, and went in search of his wife.

He entered the sitting-room ; it was empty ; a pair of candles on the table were flickering in the night-breeze which blew through the open windows, and Gerald's humour was not improved by the sight of his wife and Mr Towers walking together up and down the veranda in animated conversation—that is to say, the gentleman was speaking with animation, and the lady listening with smiles and interest. Gerald went to the window, which opened to the ground, and said, imperatively, “ Inda, come in ; you will catch cold.”

“ Oh no, Gerald,” replied Inda, pausing in front of him ; “ it is warmer out here than inside.”

But Gerald's only answer was to put out his hand and draw her, somewhat roughly, into the room, muttering as he did so, “ An old fool is the worst of any !”

“ To whom does that apply ?” inquired Lucinda.

“ Why, what can be more foolish,” said he, “ than to see an old man falandering after a young woman ?”

Inda looked up in his face, and involuntarily broke out into a fit of laughter. “ Gerald ! you can't think that Mr Towers was trying to flirt with me ?” Her tone was so incredulous and amused, that Gerald was ashamed of his suspicions, and felt, at the moment, that a young fool may be quite as absurd as an old one, when he yields to unfounded jealousy.

But it was a bad night's work which Mr Pryn had just done ; he had created a quarrel between a husband and

wife, and sown discord in what had been hitherto a pleasant friendship. Jealous distrust, when once insinuated, however it may be allayed, is very difficult to eradicate, especially from a mind like Gerald's, which rarely analysed its own feelings sufficiently to discard such as were worthless. He was conscious of something unpleasant connected with Mr Towers, and yielded to an unreasonable dislike of that gentleman, which he took no pains to conceal; he was blunt in his manner towards him, slighted him in conversation, and treated him altogether with a rudeness which must have been called very ill-bred, had it not been the effects merely of temper. Mr Towers saw that something had gone wrong, but was perfectly ignorant of the cause; he did not, however, choose to be insulted by one who, compared to him, was a mere boy in age, and he repaid Gerald's discourtesy with well-deserved coldness.

Then, Gerald had a serious difference with his wife, the point at issue being the investment of her legacy.

Inda's conversation with Mr Towers when her husband brought her in from the veranda, had been of a very business-like character; he had been telling her more about the building allotments—that he believed they would turn out a very profitable speculation—that he intended to purchase some, and Inda had taken up the subject in a very clear-headed manner.

The truth was, she was rather proud to think that she was acting in this affair on her own judgment; she liked the feeling of independence it gave her, and was pleased that a man of business should speak to her as Mr Towers had done. When, therefore, Gerald set himself to obtain

her consent to his disposal of her money, he found her with very cut and dry ideas of her own on the nature of investments, and quite prepared to stand her ground.

"At any rate," said she, "I could not consent to its being risked in a business with which Mr Pryn has so much to do, and I don't see that any better way of disposing of it offers than what I propose."

"And what can women know about such things?" asked Gerald, impatiently.

"Now, Gerald," said Inda, almost angrily, "I will not stand being spoken to in that way; women understand any subject to which they have given consideration every bit as well as men; you know they do, a great deal better than many men!"

Gerald had a sharp answer ready, and for two or three minutes the mutual duty of forbearance was rather lost sight of between them.

Inda was the first to speak coolly: "But in this case," said she, "I am not acting by my own judgment, I am going by the advice of Mr Towers."

"And do you think," asked Gerald, "that it is a becoming thing for a married woman to take the advice of another man in preference to that of her husband?"

"I think," replied Inda, "that we ought both to be very glad to get the opinion of such an experienced man as Mr Towers."

"I don't feel that I require his opinion," retorted Gerald.

"You might be the better of it for all that" said Inda, provokingly; "Mr Towers has been very kind I told him that I should like to buy some of those allotments."

"Bother the allotments!" interrupted Gerald.

"And he says," continued Inda, "that he will be happy to be of any use to us he can."

"You mean that you asked him for his assistance?" said Gerald.

"Well, perhaps I did; you would not take up my idea, and you know I have a perfect right, Gerald, to do what I like with this money."

"Oh! a right certainly," said he, sarcastically; "you can throw it into the sea if you please, which you might just as well do as what you propose."

"Well, I don't think so," replied Inda, resolutely; "I wish you would speak to Mr Towers yourself, it would be much pleasanter if you would."

"I will have nothing at all to do with it," he answered.

"But how can I manage it?" said Inda.

"Any way you please."

"Can I arrange with Mr Towers to make the purchase for me?"

"Lucinda!" exclaimed Gerald, now fairly at the end of his not very large stock of patience, "I could not have believed that any one would stick to her point in the way you are doing; if there is a thing I detest, it is obstinacy in a woman!"

"Yes; that is very fine," replied Inda, choking back some rising tears; "you would like a wife, I suppose, who had no will or purpose of her own; but I am not going to let myself be argued out of a resolution which I know is right."

"Very well," said Gerald, "you may manage it, then,

entirely yourself. I will say only one thing ; as you know so much about business, I suppose you are aware that you will get no interest for the money you invest in this way ?”

“ In the mean time, I know that, but I look forward.”

“ Take your own way, then,” said Gerald, “ muddle away your thousand pounds any how you like.”

Every sarcasm that Gerald uttered cut Inda to the heart, but she did not relinquish her point.

A few days after this she began to inform him that she had placed her piece of business in the hands of Mr Towers, but Gerald cut her narration very short indeed.

“ Lucinda, you have taken your own way, be satisfied with that ; I will neither say nor listen to anything further on the subject ; now never let me hear another word about this money.”

Inda’s behaviour was not quite what it might have been ; she pursued her own course regardless of the displeasure and annoyance of her husband. She saw that he was prejudiced against Mr Towers, yet she sought the assistance of that gentleman. She had, however, carried her point ; and as the question became, ere it was decided, very much a trial of strength between them, it is to be hoped that she tasted the pleasures of victory.

Lydia found great comfort in the companionship of Emily Pryn. Inda and Gerald, first riding, then, we unfortunately must say it, quarrelling together, were a good deal engrossed by their own concerns, and Mr Towers was fond of longer walks than his daughter was able to take. At such times, Emily stayed with her, happy to be even in her presence, and listening to all she said, with an atten-

tion and almost worship, which, had it not proceeded from pure affection, would have resembled the grossest flattery.

One day the party separated soon after breakfast; Mr Towers went out, as he said, to stretch his legs; Gerald to shoot wild duck; Lucinda retired to her room, to write letters for England, and Lydia and Emily were left together in the sitting-room.

"Do not let me keep you here, Emmy, if you think your papa wants you," observed Miss Towers; "he must not say that I monopolise you."

"Oh, no! papa likes me to be with you," was the reply; "he said yesterday that he hoped he may some day see me just such a woman as you are, and he often says such things."

A week ago this would very much have surprised Lydia, but she had herself observed a great change in the manners of Mr Pryn towards her; his supercilious indifference was laid aside, and he seemed, indeed, very anxious to propitiate her good-will. This he showed not only by the officious haste with which he rendered her any service in his power, but by a certain deference he paid to her judgment; in any little discussion he always turned to have Miss Towers's opinion! Lydia thought it nothing extraordinary that he should at last be sensible of his misconduct, and judging of him by herself, she considered it only natural that seeing a fault he should do all in his power to atone for it; thus she found a simple solution for his altered behaviour, and just as she arrived at this conclusion, the gentleman in question entered, holding in his hand a newspaper still unfolded. "I thought I should find you here," said he; "this

is an *Illustrated London News*, Miss Towers, which I have this instant received ; perhaps you will like to look at it."

"Thank you, Mr Pryn," replied Lydia, "when you have quite finished with it yourself."

"When you have finished with it will be time enough for me," said he, with a polite bow ; "favour me by taking the first reading of it."

Lydia had, however, risen. "I shall look it over with pleasure, Mr Pryn, but at this moment I must go upstairs ; I have a little piece of work which I must complete before dinner-time."

"Cannot Emily's maid do it, Miss Towers ? pray allow her."

"No, thank you, Mr Pryn, I never take the attendance of other people's servants, and this is no very formidable task ; it is merely to run a piece of lace on to a dress."

"Let me do it, dear Miss Towers," exclaimed Emily.

And as Lydia was about to refuse, Mr Pryn observed, "It is a kindness to give Emily a little piece of work ; every girl should practise sewing."

"You never let me do anything for you," added Emily, throwing her arms round her friend.

Lydia kissed the affectionate little girl, and said, with a smile, "Since you put it in that way, I believe I must consent for once, Emmy ; well, you will find the dress on the bed, and the piece of lace beside it, and needles and thread in my work-box."

"I know," replied Emily, "you have always your things so neat, just where one can find them in a moment ; I mean to be neat too."

She danced out of the room, and Mr Pryn, who looked pleased with his daughter, followed her with his eyes until she closed the door, then observed, "You don't think ill of Emily, I believe, Miss Towers?"

"Think ill of Emily, Mr Pryn!" repeated Lydia; "how can you ask me? I think her one of the sweetest girls I know."

"She has a great affection for you," rejoined Mr Pryn; "and I am sure we both are very grateful for all the kindness you show her."

"She has been a great pleasure to me during this visit," said Lydia; "she is so intelligent, and at the same time so simple-minded."

"She is a different creature since she knew you," said Mr Pryn; "for the fact is, her Aunt Rubina does not quite know how to manage her. Emily is very anxious to improve herself, and would spend a great deal of time over music and drawing; now my sister looks upon accomplishments as useless, and does not understand the child."

"But Miss Pryn's residence in your family is a great advantage to Emily," observed Lydia, "and I don't know it is to be regretted that she does not stimulate her to study. Emily is too ambitious to improve herself; she requires some one to make her take exercise for the good of her health, and to remind her that all things must come by degrees."

"When my sister first came to us," said Mr Pryn, "her presence was a great comfort; but now she speaks of returning home, and I shall not oppose it."

"Does Miss Pryn speak of leaving you?" said Lydia.
"I did not know it."

"Why, it is strange to prefer any place to Westleigh, but we all feel the attractions of home; the attachment to particular spots grows very strong; you, Miss Towers, must regret Westleigh very much."

"My home," replied Lydia, "is wherever my friends are. But," she added, "I will not set up to be stoical; I do love Westleigh very much."

"And would you willingly return to it?"

"Of that I don't allow myself to think; I have quite enough to do with the duties of the present without troubling myself about the future."

"But that future may not be far distant, for at this moment it is in your power to return to Westleigh."

Lydia was struck with the turn the conversation had imperceptibly taken, and raising her eyes they met those of Mr Pryn fixed penetratingly on her face; his last words sounded very ambiguous, and she knew just enough of Mr Pryn's character to warrant a not very favourable construction. It glanced vaguely through her mind that he wanted her to use her influence with her father in some way; accordingly she answered coldly, "It is possible that in time papa's affairs may improve, so as to enable us to return to Westleigh; in no other way is the thing practicable."

"It was not of your father, but of yourself I spoke in connexion with Westleigh," observed Mr Pryn. "Miss Towers, you are a person who, to be appreciated, require to be known; the more I see of you, the more I see reason

to admire your talents and esteem your goodness ; and should you return my sentiments, I shall with pride make you mistress of Westleigh and of everything I possess."

"Mr Pryn !" exclaimed Lydia, "you astonish me ; and I must beg you to put such thoughts entirely out of your head, and not to recur to this conversation."

"What ! Miss Towers," exclaimed the gentleman, "do you mean to say that you refuse my offer ?"

"If you mean to say, Mr Pryn," replied Lydia, who looked simply very much surprised, and neither flattered nor gratified ; "if you mean that you have made me an offer of marriage, I certainly do refuse it."

"Your reasons, if you please ?" he demanded, in a tone of suppressed rage and scorn.

"Indeed," answered Lydia, "I do not feel that I am called upon to give any."

"Perhaps," said Mr Pryn, "you think my fortune not sufficient ? but I can assure you that there are in Sydney few persons"——

"Stop, Mr Pryn," interrupted Lydia ; "understand that no consideration of what your fortune may be in the least influences my answer."

"Then you esteem the disparity of age too great ?"

"No," Lydia replied, "I do not feel that in all cases that need be an objection."

"Then perhaps it is my personal appearance ?" said Mr Pryn, in an accent of great pique.

"No, believe me, Mr Pryn," said Lydia, with much feeling and kindness, "it is not that."

"Then," said he, fixing his small piercing eyes upon

her, "I can conclude nothing but that you are pre-engaged."

"That," replied Lydia, "is a question I do not feel you have a right to ask."

Not satisfied, however, and wishing to force her to confession, he ran over in his mind the names of the unmarried men intimate in her father's house, from most of whom she received a great deal of attention as an agreeable and talented girl. "I see," said he, triumphantly, "it is that fellow Charles Lancefield, who, till within the last year, had not one shilling to rub against another."

"Mr Pryn," said Lydia, rising abruptly, "I beg you to speak respectfully of Mr Lancefield."

The suspicions of Mr Pryn were answered.

"At any rate," said he, "I think I might have expected my offer to be more gratefully received, when I offer to restore you to the position from which you have fallen."

"I do not consider that I have fallen," interrupted Lydia; "the circumstances of my family have changed, but loss of fortune does not, in my eyes, imply degradation; and I hope that I should never, from the purely mercenary motives you hold out, accept of a person who has given me no reason either to like or to esteem him."

There was an excited pause; Pryn was silent because his feelings of resentment were too many for utterance, and Lydia was striving to subdue the temper which had been exasperated by the disparaging mention of Charles Lancefield. But in that interval of reflection, while his anger seemed only to gain strength, and, painted in his countenance, rendered it almost diabolical, Lydia's

vexation subsided, and as she moved towards the door she said, calmly, "If I have been too keen, and said anything that could wound or offend you, Mr Pryn, I beg your pardon."

Her manner had so much of sweetness and so much of dignity that, despite his mortification, Mr Pryn admired her more than ever, and wished if possible not to take her refusal as decisive; he was about to speak again, but her leaving the room prevented him.

The visit, when concluded, had in some respects answered its purpose; Lydia had recruited her strength, the gentlemen had enjoyed some shooting and fishing, and Inda had seen something of country life in Australia; yet there were few of the party to whom that brief sojourn in the "garden of the colony" was not productive of unpleasant reminiscences. Miss Towers had received an offer which was an insult rather than a compliment; for she did consider it an insult that a man who had treated her and her family with systematic impertinence, should imagine she could so far forget what was due to herself as to consent to become his wife. Gerald and Lucinda were conscious of a mutual estrangement; and Inda, as she sat on the deck of the steamer bound for Sydney, looked at her husband, who kept apart from her, and thought of her one thousand pounds; she felt how possible it is to have one's own way and yet not be the happier. Not that she repented of what she had done—she had acted as her judgment told her was prudent; but she was nevertheless dissatisfied with herself, and conscience spoke with a vaguely accusing voice.

There was something in the very brightness of the day, the sunshine dancing on the smooth waters, the cheerful tones of conversation around, which added to the depression which crept over her on that short voyage. It was a painful constraint to her to sit in company where, had she been alone, she would have wept; but Lydia and Emily were within a few yards of her, a group of gentlemen near, and she was forced to control her feelings. At last the effort to appear cheerful became unbearable; and feeling that tears, in spite of her efforts to keep them back, were filling her eyes, she moved to a seat apart, where, placing herself with her back to the company, she leaned over the side of the vessel, and appeared absorbed in watching the waves; but it was little Inda noted those sparkling waters, her eyes were blinded with tears, which silently, unwiped away rolled down her cheeks. She believed herself unnoticed, but Gerald was lounging at some distance, in a rather sullen mood, and observed her; her small bonnet did not conceal her face, and he saw the tears dropping from her eyes. The sight of Inda weeping, and apparently without cause, was so unusual, that for several seconds he looked at her without moving, then he walked to where she sat, and laying his hand on her shoulder, whispered, as he bent down to her, "What is the matter?"

For a moment Inda could not answer, then he caught the words, "I wish Mr Pryce's legacy had been left to some one else, before ever it made dissension between us."

"You would have lost the pleasure of investing it," said he, dryly.

"I should not have lost your love," almost sobbed Inda,

"which I value more." Gerald's clouded brow relaxed, he waited for one word more. "But," added she, "I could not have done differently, I acted conscientiously."

Gerald withdrew his hand from her shoulder and turned away. And here we leave them for the present, as little likely to come together as two parallel lines, for while there was pride on Gerald's part, and coldness on Lucinda's, which would make the first advance?

This chapter might have been headed, "The price of victory."

CHAPTER XVIII.

No event of importance had taken place in Gerald's little circle in Sydney during his few weeks' absence. Mr Bright was domesticated at the cottage; and Margaret looked all the happier for having her father under her roof, where she was able hourly to exert her good influence over him. But Mr Milner, it immediately struck Gerald, wore a cloud upon his brow, and exhibited a certain shortness of temper, from which it may be inferred that he found on trial that the addition to his family involved a discomfort greater than was easy to put up with good-humouredly.

A few days after their return, Inda invited Margaret to accompany her in her afternoon drive, she having a carriage, while her sister-in-law had none. It was not that Mr Milner could not afford as many luxuries as Gerald, but both he and Margaret were simple in their tastes; by preference they continued to reside in that small cottage where there was little more accommodation than sufficed for their own family; had she wished it, Mr Milner would probably have kept her a carriage, but Margaret was perfectly satisfied to walk, and when the weather was too hot for her usual exercise, she confined herself to the house or her garden.

Inda, on the other hand, as her husband's income in-

creased, allowed herself to be surrounded by much of the expensive luxury with which he had provided her on her marriage; but it was for his pleasure that she did so. Accordingly, Inda would call at the cottage (where Margaret was always dressed with the utmost simplicity) in her delicate French muslins in summer, and her rich furs and velvet in winter, thinking no more of these things, or of herself for having them, than if she possessed them not.

It was seldom that Margaret went out except with her husband or her children, but Mr Milner begged her to accept her sister-in-law's invitation; he was pleased she should have a little variety occasionally, and promised to take charge of Freddy during her absence. She therefore had pleasure in going, and took her little Edith with her.

One of the servants had made Freddy a present of a green parrot, and while his mother and sister were away, he amused himself with it, showing off its acquirements in speaking to his grandfather, who stood by him.

"But you should teach your parrot to say something funnier," observed Mr Bright, when the bird had repeated its various phrases, of which "Give me a cup of tea" was the most remarkable.

"What could I teach him that would be 'funnier?'" said Freddy.

"Oh! I don't know; we had a parrot on board the steamer I came up from Van Dieman's Land in, that used to swear like a trooper. Teach your parrot to say, "Damn you! give me a cup of tea!"

Freddy looked doubtful of the propriety of the amendment, and repeated his grandfather's words at first shyly,

but more confidently the second time; and on the parrot making an indistinct sound, which, by a little imagination, might be taken for the phrase in question, he clapped his hands, exclaiming joyfully that it had learnt it already.

"Freddy," said Mr Milner, looking up from a book with which he had hitherto appeared entirely engaged, "go to the nursery, and remain there until your mamma comes home."

"Oh! poor little fellow, he is very happy here," observed Mr Bright; "let him remain and amuse his old grand-dad."

"Frederick, did you hear what I said?" inquired his father, not deigning even to notice the old man's request; and Freddy knew his father too well to hesitate about obeying an order which already had been repeated. Mr Milner waited until the door closed behind his son, then rose, and laying down his book, said, "Mr Bright, I am astonished to hear you give such lessons to the child."

"I did not mean any harm," was the apology; "I taught him nothing very bad."

"Then if you did not mean any harm,—if you think that the words you used are not very bad,—it only the more shows how lost you must be to the very sense of what is wrong; and you cannot be astonished when I say that I cannot retain under my roof one who will corrupt my children without even knowing he is doing so."

Mr Bright was quite startled and silenced. Considering that their relative position was really that of father and son-in-law, there was something painful in the different manner assumed by the two: the humble attempt at

apology on the part of the old man, and the haughty admonitory tone of Mr Milner. "I shall not hurry you from here," resumed the latter; "I wish to pay you every consideration consistent with my duty as a parent; but in the course of a few days I hope you will provide yourself with another home, and I am your pecuniary debtor to any amount that may be requisite to procure you suitable lodgings."

But this speech was not received as the former had been; Mr Bright had a hot Irish temper, and much natural pride, which was roused by what he esteemed an insult. "And do you suppose," he demanded, "that I will accept the money of a man who turns me out of his house? No, Mr Milner, I will not sleep another night under your roof, and I only repent that I have eaten of your bread so long." He moved towards the door.

"Stay, Mr Bright," said Mr Milner, "do nothing under the influence of temper:" but his words, if heard, were disregarded; the door had closed before the sentence was well concluded, and Mr Milner heard him ascending the stairs to his own room. Mr Milner felt, to tell the truth, rather uncomfortable. "What might not the old man do in his impetuosity," he sat ruminating for some minutes; then consoled himself with the reflection, "He will work it off, Margaret will smooth him down when she comes home." And he returned to the perusal of his book.

Mr Bright's occupation, as soon as he reached his own apartment, was to divest himself of every article of dress purchased for him either by Gerald or Mr Milner, and the very things given him by Margaret had been paid for, he

well knew, with her husband's money; and he arrayed himself instead in the shabby working man's clothes he had worn on his arrival in Sydney. The rest of his small possessions he tied up once more in his blue cotton handkerchief, and taking his stick in his hand, in this guise he walked from the house.

Margaret meanwhile returned from a pleasant drive with Lucinda; and as the latter declined coming in at the cottage, Margaret requested to be set down at her own gate, intending to walk up the avenue. How was she astonished at the sight which met her eyes! Leaning against the paling stood her father, metamorphosed, so it seemed to her, from the neat figure which her care had made him, into a man of the poorest and humblest description; his white hair streamed from beneath his almost rimless hat, and his bundle, attached to the end of his stick, was suspended over his shoulder. The carriage had driven away with Lucinda before she recognised him. "Father!" she exclaimed, "what is the meaning of this?"

The old man looked at her with a softened and sad expression. "I have been waiting to see you, Maggie; I would not go without getting a last kiss from you."

"But go! where, father? you are not going to leave us?"

"I have been turned by your husband out of his house, Maggie, and it is impossible I should remain another night in it." Margaret leaned almost fainting against the paling, while her father gave a slight and hurried sketch of what had happened. "But I know, my dear," he concluded by saying, "that you are not to blame, and I could not go without saying good-bye." He held out his hand, but

Margaret pressed hers to her forehead, and tried to consider what was best to be done.

"You must go to Gerald's," she said.

"No, I shall not go to Gerald's," was the reply; "he would not thank me for showing myself at his house; he let me know that plain enough."

"But why are you in these clothes?" asked Margaret.

"Because I don't choose to wear clothes paid for by those who think that by money alone they earn a right to my gratitude. I have my own feelings, Margaret, though I am not fine enough for one of my children, nor good enough for the other."

Margaret burst into tears. "And where will you go?" she asked.

"I don't quite know yet. But," he added, touched by the tearful anxiety of her face, "you know I have been used to shift for myself, and I can have no difficulty in getting a room."

"Do not go far away," urged Margaret.

"No, I will not; I will not give up the pleasure, as long as it is allowed me, of seeing you and the little ones."

They parted. Margaret stood looking for a moment after the retreating figure of her father, as, with all his worldly goods upon his back, he went forth again without a home in the wide world, then hastened into the cottage to hear her husband's version of the story. Mr Milner spoke in a way that made it very difficult for Margaret to know what to say; he was unimpassioned and reasonable; he could not have done otherwise, he said, than require the

old man to seek another home, though it was entirely his own doing to leave the house in the way he did ; he made allowance for Margaret's feelings, and was disposed to be kinder to her than usual ; but Margaret, although she did not exactly attach blame to her husband, was thoroughly unhappy, and being unable to respond to his offer to read aloud to her, or his attempts to interest her in other subjects, yet, unwilling to show a tearful face in his presence, she spent the greater part of the evening in her own room—nearly the first time that she had ever so withdrawn.

Mr Milner likewise spent a solitary and uncomfortable evening, and as he sat with his head resting on his hands, he recalled the remark of Mr Francis, when discouraging his niece's marriage, "You do not now see all the disagreeables in which a connexion with this young woman will involve you." Mr Milner did not love Margaret less now than then ; indeed, he felt that "the wife is dearer than the bride ;" still, he felt that there was more truth in the warning than he had at the time believed. This conviction was not altogether the result of what had just transpired ; it had been gradually gaining ground in his mind, as he perceived how little effect Margaret's good qualities had in overcoming the prejudice against her in society. Neither had the connexion been wholly beneficial to his own character ; he had become in a measure soured with mankind, and cut off from the interchange of those little social amenities which ameliorate the disposition ; the harsher traits of his own had gained prominence ; had he compared himself as he now was with what he had been

at the period of his arrival in the colony, he would have found that he was less amiable—less forbearing.

Mr Bright was not without means of paying for his own lodging; he had received in Van Dieman's Land, as shepherd, and in various other capacities, the high rate of wages usual in the colony; and his savings of several years amounted to about eighty pounds. With this sum he could live for the present, and he took one small room, which, though not to be compared to the neat lodging in which his son had placed him, satisfied him.

There Margaret visited him as before, and when the storm had a little blown over, took her children, who were not yet of an age to regard whether a relative resided in a large or a small house. As Margaret's visits were usually paid about eleven or twelve o'clock, after she had settled the little affairs of her household, it followed that Mr Milner had always gone to his office, and she, perceiving that the very mention of her father irritated him, did not unnecessarily intrude his name in conversation. But she had no thought of any concealment, and one day related something that had passed between her father and Frederick.

"You don't mean," said Mr Milner, looking up hastily, "that you take the children to your father's lodging?"

"Oh yes, Edmund," Margaret replied. "Seeing them is the greatest pleasure my poor father has; he is so fond of them, and they are of him."

"I wonder, Margaret, you don't see that if the children are to associate with your father, they might as well do so in this house as in any other. I am sorry to say," he

added, after a moment's pause, "that I must forbid you to take them there any more."

Margaret looked ready to cry. "O Edmund," said she, "I hope you do not mean that; the children, I assure you, can get no harm. I am present the whole time, and hear every word that passes; and I think they really do him more good than anything I can say; they repeat their pretty little hymns and texts, and sometimes I have seen him wipe away a tear."

"Very possibly," replied Mr Milner, coldly; "nevertheless, my first duty is to guard my children from even the possibility of contamination, and unless my wife chooses to disobey me, she will take them there no more."

Poor Margaret felt herself in a most painful position. It would be impossible, she knew, to conceal from her father the true reason of the children coming no more to see him, and she shrunk from inflicting upon him any additional mortification. With rather cowardly feeling, she put off the dreaded explanation, and the next few days being wet, gave her an excuse for not as usual visiting her father. At the end of that time, however, she could no longer devise an excuse for staying away; the weather had cleared, and she received a note of reminder from her father. It was an awkward-looking missive, consisting of a piece of dirty paper, badly folded, on which were scrawled the words, "Why do you not come and see me, Maggie?" About this note an unfortunate circumstance occurred. Mr Bright, with some vague idea of preventing it falling into any hands but those of his daughter, instead of sending it by post, intrusted it to a boy, whom he directed,

not to deliver it openly at the door, but to thrust it under the garden gate, promising him the reward of a penny. But the boy, by some stupidity, executed his commission at the very moment when Mr Milner was setting out for his office, in company with Margaret, who was strolling with him to the end of the avenue. He saw a boy of disreputable appearance push something under the gate, then run away, and stooped to pick it up. Though directed to his wife, he opened the paper, and an expression of displeasure and contempt came over his countenance as he read.

"What is the meaning of this subterfuge, Margaret?" he asked, fixing his eyes sternly upon her; "why does your father have recourse to this mode of getting his letters delivered?"

Poor Margaret looked completely ashamed, but replied with unhesitating simplicity, "I am sure I don't know, Edmund."

Mr Milner looked at her intently. "You do know, Margaret; it is because he believes that I disapprove of your going to see him, and he would willingly lead you into a clandestine intercourse; he would mislead, in one way or another, every member of my family, and then say that he meant no harm!"

"I daresay," said Margaret, sadly, "that my poor father may have had some such idea as you suppose; but remember, Edmund, that it is misery which has crushed out of him every upright and honourable feeling; the worse he is, the more reason there is for me continuing to visit him; you may have been right about the children, but he will do me no harm."

"I suppose he will do you no harm," repeated Mr Milner. Then, as if the question was full of difficulties through which he did not see his way, he abruptly terminated the conversation, and passed through the gate which led from the garden.

Margaret could no longer defer the explanation with her father, and she went to see him that same morning. As she had expected, she no sooner entered the room than he asked, "Where are the children?"

"They are at home," she replied, and attempted to divert his attention by offering to read to him; but the old man was not to be so easily put off, and inquired why she had not brought his favourite Fred. Margaret would not persevere in evasion, and told him, though as gently as possible, that her husband had forbidden her to bring them any more. Mr Bright said little, and as she again proposed to read, made no objection; but though the subject she selected was one which at another time would have interested him greatly—a newspaper account of the capture of a bush-ranger—it was evident that his thoughts were wandering, and at last he interrupted her, saying, "Never mind reading, Maggie, I can't just attend, and I have something to say."

His daughter laid down the paper.

"I see," he resumed, "that I am just in the way here, and a burden to my children; no—don't say anything, you have nothing to blame yourself for, nor do I wish to blame Gerald; I daresay it is very natural, but he is ashamed of me. I only get you into trouble with your husband, and I have sometimes suspected that even Gerald's fine lady-wife

does not lead the easier life with him for the kindness she shows me—so all considered, I shall just take myself back to Van Dieman's Land."

"O father!" said Margaret, who felt the more pained since there was a great deal in his speech she could not contradict, "what would you do there? You have not the means of living; your money will soon be exhausted."

"I shall do as I have done," was the reply, "and as long as I have the use of my hands and my wits, I cannot starve."

Considering the use which Mr Bright once made of his wits, this remark might have a doubtful construction; and there rushed upon Margaret's mind the recollection of her promise to her mother, not to lose sight of her father when once his term of punishment had expired.

"Well, father," said she, "promise me one thing, do nothing about your departure until you see me again."

While walking home, she revolved the subject in her mind, and suddenly a bright idea struck her; she would write to her uncle Francis, who, we have mentioned, was a city missionary in Hobart Town, and would, she was sure, if applied to, consent either to receive her father into his own house, or, if that were impossible, would undertake to provide him with respectable accommodation, and exercise over him a kind, yet watchful surveillance. When this plan occurred to her, Margaret felt greatly relieved; while her husband applauded the idea, and did all in his power to forward it.

"Your uncle," he observed, "is not in circumstances to make it right to involve him in any expense, so we must furnish your father with the means of paying his own way;

indeed, I have been thinking that the best thing will be to make a small settlement upon him, and let him receive it in quarterly payments."

"You are very generous, Edmund," replied his wife; "but my father, I feel assured, will not accept of a farthing; he is very proud in his own way; he intends to work with his hands, and receive wages for his toil."

It revolted Mr Milner to think of his wife's father being sunk so utterly out of the condition of a gentleman, but this grievance he had no power to remedy.

Mr Francis was written to, and returned an answer as satisfactory as could be desired; he engaged to receive the old man—for a time at all events—into his own house, and stated that he had so large an acquaintance, especially among persons who were willing to make an effort to do good, that he thought he could put him into the way of obtaining respectable employment. Mr Bright himself offered no objection to the arrangement, and Margaret felt that she was thus enabled to fulfil her promise to her mother, in the spirit, if not in the letter; for she knew that her father would have greater advantages under the eye of such a man as her uncle, than he could have amid all the drawbacks of his residence in Sydney.

But how uncertain are the best-devised human plans! The lodging was given up, but a few days remained before the sailing of the vessel, when news arrived of the sudden death of Mr Francis. Margaret loved her good uncle sincerely, yet disinterested grief for his death certainly, in some degree, merged in embarrassment at the disconcerting of her arrangements. Mr Bright refused to delay his de-

parture ; his room was let to another tenant ; he had made up his mind, he said, to go, and he would sail by the next steamer as he had intended. The more Margaret reflected, the less she thought she could let him go alone ; she pictured him, even during the voyage, making acquaintance with vulgar, disreputable persons, going on his arrival into the first cheap lodgings that offered, and so the last state of that man should be worse than the first.

She told her husband that she wished to accompany her father, to help him to settle, and to place him with some Christian, however humble, family.

But Mr Milner was by this time thoroughly out of humour with Mr Bright ; the only disagreement he had ever had with Margaret had been occasioned by him ; from the hour of his arrival he had been a source of nothing but vexation ; and now the climax of all seemed to be in Margaret's starting with him on this vague—he had almost said vagrant—journey. He peremptorily told her that he would not consent to her leaving home. But Mr Milner was destined to prove his wife in a new light from any in which she had yet appeared. So far from yielding, she adhered to her point ; and even stated that if she was so unfortunate as to fail of obtaining his consent, she felt it would be her duty to carry out her intention without it. Margaret had at this time a young infant who depended on her for nourishment, and whose delicacy made it an object of more than usual care. She had little doubt that Lucinda, if requested to do so, would take considerable charge of the elder children during her absence, and she proposed to take her baby with her.

"You will not take the baby with you," said Mr Milner, when informed of her arrangement; "not one of the children shall leave this house."

He expected that by this decision he would compel her to relinquish her plan, for he well knew her devotion to her children; but after a moment's reflection, Margaret replied—"In that case I must do the best I can for her without me; I believe she would run less risk in being taken, than in being left to the care of servants; but you have, I do not dispute, a right to settle that point, and if you are decided, I must even trust my baby to Providence." She wiped away a tear as she spoke, and Mr Milner could hardly believe his own ears.

Perhaps she was the more intent on her mission towards her father from having been lately almost face to face with death. In the case of her uncle, she thought to herself, sudden death could be but sudden glory; she could not wish him back, he had gone from toil to rest; but had the summons come instead to her father, how different must have been her feelings! and she felt that, in comparison with the eternal welfare of an immortal soul, the present comfort of even husband, children, home, was as nothing.

The moment of final decision drew on; Mr Milner's opposition, though each day more stern and inflexible as he found himself defied, availed nothing against the quiet impracticability of his wife; and the morning arrived on which the steamer was to sail. By tacit consent, the subject was avoided until Mr Milner was on the point of setting out for his office, then Margaret detained him with a peculiar and imploring look.

"Edmund," said she, "the steamer sails this afternoon."

Mr Milner paused at the door, all his worst dispositions were roused. "Margaret," said he, emphatically, "if you leave this house in opposition to my desire, you do not return to it; so choose between your father and me."

He quitted the cottage without another word; and Margaret, retreating to her own room, locked herself in, and spent the next hour kneeling, with her face buried at the foot of her bed. When she rose, she looked flushed and feverish, but there were no signs of wavering in her face. She took a sheet of paper and wrote upon it a few lines, this she sealed in an envelope; next she took out of a closet a small carpet-bag, which she filled with a few indispensable articles of clothing; this done, she proceeded to the nursery. Her children were taking their mid-day sleep; she bent over them and kissed them in their cots; the baby she lifted in her arms, and held for some minutes, while her tears dropped upon its face, she had a feeling that she would never see it again; but she wiped them away, and forcing calmness, approached the couches of the others. Freddy was wakened by his mother's kisses, and knelt up in bed to play with her; he did not know that anything particular was going to happen, but he always responded to her caresses; and as she kissed him repeatedly, and pressed him almost convulsively to her heart, he twined his arms round her neck, saying he would not let her go. How could she tear herself away from such a child?

"Freddy," said she, "you must pray for mamma every evening in your prayers."

"I do," said Freddy, who had been taught to do so from his infancy.

"Then never forget."

Lastly, she visited her little Edith. She would have liked to take with her the recollection of a last word or caress from her also; some childish expressions of love, spoken in Edith's lisping, imperfect tones; but Edith was sound asleep, and Margaret, with a mother's unselfish affection, would not waken her for her own pleasure; so she contented herself with severing one fair curl of the unconscious child's hair and with it quitted the nursery.

She returned to her own room, took the travelling-bag in her hand, and without any one seeing her, walked from the house. When Mr Milner came home in the evening he found a note addressed to himself on the table: the contents were as follows:—"You say I must choose between you and my father; I was his daughter before I was your wife, and duty calls me to go to him. But, O Edmund," the writer continued, as though in an uncontrollable outburst of feeling, "I cannot believe that we are parting for ever! After what you said, I shall not venture to return until I receive permission from you; but one line addressed to the post office, Hobart Town, will bring me back to you as soon as I have seen my father settled. May Heaven ever bless you and our children!—MARGARET."

Margaret waited in vain for any letter.

While a knell tolls over the hopes of one person, the marriage-bell rings for another; while Mr Milner was plunged in a strange and unexpected misery, Charles

Lancefield's wedding took place. Many a day had come and gone since the first words of love he spoke to Lydia, and time and worldly changes had proved the fidelity of both; it was with hearts taught and chastened that they at length received the church's blessing on their long-plighted faith, and in the presence of a circle of mutual friends exchanged a holier vow than that which is spoken in the heyday of youth and untried affection.

CHAPTER XIX.

NEARLY two years had elapsed since Gerald and Mr Pryn first entered into partnership. During that time their mercantile connexion had considerably extended, and the general belief was that they had greatly prospered ; but if we make use of a phrase of the day, and say they had greatly “ gone ahead,” the term will be more expressive. The success of their early speculations encouraged them to undertake others, with little regard to how deeply they were involving, not only themselves, but a large circle in connexion with them. Their appearance in the world was still most flourishing ; they had removed from the modest offices where they commenced business, into large highly-rented premises, and neither partner lacked in his house any of the luxuries of life. But while this increased expenditure might be regarded as signs of a business rising in proportion, there were points on which the opinion entertained of them was not so favourable. They had at least the character of being very sharp ; and a word or glance of much significance was often the answer when the firm of Bright and Pryn was mentioned as a party in any transaction. Perhaps if we look into the grounds of these hints, they may be thus explained. When they first set up as merchants, the wish of both had been to be fair and honour-

able in all their dealings; but they were alike in loving too well all the things that money can procure; and the desire to grow rich faster than by strictly honest means was possible, could not but lead to deterioration in practice.

Pryn was in the habit of talking fluently about the rights of all men being equal; but his practical understanding of the argument was, that every man has a right to do the best he can for himself, and either he must take advantage of another or be himself cheated.

Gerald was by nature far more conscientious; at times he was startled by the reckless temerity with which Pryn dashed at everything, and would shrink from the unscrupulous means his partner adopted; but he had habituated himself to so many acts of deception, and so often tampered with conscience, as materially to lower the moral tone of his mind; and it was impossible to associate intimately with a man like Pryn, and not be more or less influenced by his worldly principles. Besides which, though not the nominal head of the firm, Pryn's superior age and experience in business gave him in reality the lead, which Gerald, so long as he was duly consulted, did not oppose; and it was far easier to give any doubtful question the go-by than to look closely into it, and involve himself thereby in trouble and argument.

"Bright," said Pryn, one day as they sat together in a private room behind the office, "you know that ship that went ashore last year on Shark Island?"

"The *Southern Cross*," said Gerald; "yes, what of her?"

"She is to be sold by auction," was the reply, "and I have been thinking that we might do worse than bid for her."

"What for?" asked Gerald, in a tone of surprise.

"For anything that may offer; we can trade a little on our own hook."

"But that damaged old tub will never make out another voyage," said Gerald.

"Yes she will, I was over her to-day; we would have her of course properly surveyed, and she may require a few repairs, but she will do very well for what I mean."

Gerald said nothing, he waited to hear his partner's views more fully explained.

"We might send her first," resumed Pryn, "an experimental voyage—send her, say, to the South Sea Islands, with no cargo, only notions for the natives to be bartered for sandal wood."

"If such a trip was likely to be profitable," said Gerald, "I would rather charter a better vessel."

"Much more expensive," rejoined Pryn; "the *Southern Cross* will be going for an old song, the upset price I hear is to be very low; we will insure her well, and if anything should happen, it will be no great odds."

"The fact is," observed Gerald, "I am not inclined to enter on any new speculations just now; we have too many irons in the fire as it is, Pryn."

"This is not the time to draw any out," replied Mr Pryn; "we must have resources to fall back upon."

"But I feel as things stand we ought not to go on. Pryn," continued Gerald, lowering his voice and touching significantly some letters open on the table, "in the present state of affairs we cannot, as honest men, involve ourselves more deeply."

"But this involves no one," interrupted Pryn; "there will not be the shadow of a risk." The words were uttered in a tone of peculiar emphasis, and might have attracted his partner's attention; but Gerald was himself rather excited, and the words alone fell upon his ear.

"I often think," said he, "that we should have done better never to have tried any of these speculations; it would have been safer to have stuck to the agency business we began with."

"You are very cautious to-day," sneered Pryn; "but remember, there are times when we must reverse the proverb, and say that valour is the better part of prudence."

Before this conversation opened, both gentlemen had been deeply engaged—the one perusing some important letters, the other balancing the books, neither of which presented statements at all satisfactory. That at the present moment their position was very critical, and their apparent prosperity in a great measure fictitious, neither could disguise; but the effect of this conviction was very different on the two: Gerald felt driven to reflection and to prudence; while the ever-restless mind of Pryn sought about for fresh resources, and thought only of relieving their difficulties by means of new speculations. The meditations of the two resulted in the foregoing dialogue.

"At any rate," said Gerald, in conclusion, "I will not agree to this hastily; I will see the vessel myself, and think about it."

"Of course," replied the other, "I have only made a suggestion; if you don't approve, why, I drop the idea."

Little intention had Mr Pryn, for all this suave speech,

to allow anything to divert him from his purpose, nor had he really much fear of serious opposition ; for he had well studied his partner's character, and he knew how to humour and manage Gerald—how by deference, at least in words, to blind and flatter him, while in reality he carried out his own views.

All in the present instance went on as he had wished. The *Southern Cross* was bought for a very low price, and soon was prepared for her first voyage. Her cargo indeed was little worth, merely trifling articles to tempt the natives of the islands ; but as Pryn said that he expected to make a large profit on the sandal wood, for which these were to be exchanged, the insurance was very considerable. One delay, however, occurred in her getting to sea, and this was in the appointment of a captain ; for on this point Pryn was very hard to please, rejecting several men of undoubted capacity, and whose characters stood high, on apparently no other grounds than his own caprice.

About this time Henry Lancefield returned from a ten months' voyage. In this interval he had grown from a boy into a man, and in some respects he was a fine young man ; his appearance was agreeable, his manners easy and gentlemanly, and in his profession he displayed an ability which, if well directed, bid fair for his advancement in life. Yet, in spite of all this, he did not bring with him the good word of his captain or the favour of any on board. Shortly before entering the Heads, he had some difference with the chief officer ; and immediately on coming into harbour, his engagement being only by the voyage, he quitted the vessel.

In Sydney he had very few friends, his former companions being scattered far and wide in their various professions; his brother, however, received him affectionately, and gave him at once a home in his house. But Henry responded very coldly to Mr Lancefield's welcome. Though not altogether deficient in a sailor-like openness of manner, it soon became apparent that this was a very superficial frankness, and beneath it lay an undercurrent of character not so easily penetrated. The truth was, that in Henry's mind there was working a deep-rooted discontent, both as to his past seafaring experience, and his prospects for the future; and he fancied it would be a triumph to Charles to know that the profession he had so wilfully adopted in defiance of advice and remonstrance had, hitherto at least, answered far more to the prophecies of his friends than to his own expectations. To rough life, in a certain sense, he had been prepared; nor was he ignorant that in every profession the first steps must be attended with more or less hardship; but in the service he had entered, this up-hill work was of a nature to be by him most keenly disrelished. While serving his apprenticeship before the mast, the duties required of him included a great deal of actual drudgery, as swabbing decks, feeding stock, with a variety of other odd jobs; in such work his clothes became dirty and worn, when there was no possibility of replacing them. He was treated but in common with three or four other boys, none of whom were from his rank in life, and consequently were able to take, as a matter of course, duties which with him went particularly against the grain. That he had voluntarily chosen the circumstances in which he

felt thus misplaced, was small consolation, when day by day his proud, sensitive feelings were stung by mortifications. Many a passion of tears had he shed in secret when summoned to sweep down the poop while passengers were present, ladies, perhaps, sitting round ; and often had his neglect of such an order, or a saucy remonstrance, brought upon him merited though harsh punishment. No doubt, Henry had sometimes sailed with very rough and tyrannical captains, and had reason to complain of ill usage from the officers next in command ; yet it must be owned that he had never once really tried to do his duty, had never endeavoured to deserve kindness, nor had met rebuke in any other spirit than one of sullen opposition. The period of his apprenticeship, however, wore on, he passed his examinations, and the last voyage he had sailed in the capacity of third mate. But this step of promotion did not bring him a release from all his troubles ; the evil was, in a great measure, in Henry's own heart—in his rebellious temper and spirit of restless ambition, which scarcely knew what he aimed at, but only that he was dissatisfied and unhappy in present circumstances.

As long as his money lasted, he amused himself well enough in Sydney, attending the theatre and other places of entertainment ; but his purse was soon exhausted, and it became necessary for him to seek another engagement. This, however, proved not so easy to obtain ; no captain who knew him would have anything to do with him, and he went from one vessel to another that was preparing for sea, offering his services, to find them in every case rejected.

For his own convenience, he accepted his brother's offer of a home ; but his object seemed to be to make himself as disagreeable a guest as possible, especially to his sister-in-law. He had taken some dislike to Lydia, perhaps, because she tried once or twice to give him a few words of good advice, and he was really ingenious in tormenting her. He would smoke in his room, though she begged him not to do it ; he disregarded her hours, and treated her, at least whenever they were alone, with insolent neglect. It was very rarely that Lydia, whose sweet temper and obliging disposition made her an almost universal favourite, had been subjected to intentional impertinence, and it cut her to the heart to find that her husband's only brother, with whom she would have liked to be on pleasant and affectionate terms, had taken such a prejudice against her ; but she forbore making any complaint to her husband, and rather strove to conceal from him that she had anything to bear, for she was unwilling to occasion a quarrel between the brothers, and dreaded losing Henry, the only friend whom he possessed almost in the world.

One afternoon, Henry Lancefield was lounging on one of the quays, like a restless spirit haunting the scene of its former occupations. Around him was bustle and activity with which he had nothing to do ; the ground was strewn with bales of wool—that wealth of the interior and of the colony—the square canvas masses bearing various, and many of them well-known brands. Henry Lancefield stood leaning against one of them ; a cigar was in his mouth, which he was smoking without any appearance of relish, but rather as though he had no enjoyment in it, or

in anything else in the world. His complexion was sunburnt to the colour of mahogany, and his dress as untidy as when we first saw him, five years before, lounging and smoking on the race-course.

Among the ships lying in the wharf was one small vessel, on the deck of which a gentleman suddenly appeared, and ran jauntily down the plank which connected it with the quay. This was Mr Pryn, who had been paying one of his frequent visits to the *Southern Cross*. He was well pleased with what he saw, and certainly, by dint of a little paint, calking, and holystoning, a great effect had been produced by small expense; therefore he was in good spirits, and therefore he tripped briskly down the plank, landing almost close to Henry. They recognised each other, and Mr Pryn stopped to speak. "Well, Lancefield," said he, "idling on shore still?"

"On shore, because I can get no berth at sea," was the reply; "give a dog a bad name, and you may as well hang him."

As he said this, lounging there in his idle attitude, with his slovenly dress and discontented face, there was something in his appearance so reckless, that the words which involuntarily dropped, half muttered, from Mr Pryn's lips were, "You are a nice nut for the devil to crack." But he observed aloud, "If a man gets a bad name, it is generally his own fault; and if he does not get on in the world, that is generally his own fault too."

"I don't see the first," replied Henry, "for I am no worse than others, and my enemies can't say of me that I am incompetent in my profession; I am fit at this moment to hold a certificate as master."

"Ha!" said Pryn, with more interest.

"And one thing I am determined on," pursued Henry, "nothing shall induce me to sail again in a subordinate capacity; the disagreeables which I have undergone during the last some years, no mortal will believe."

"But what can you expect but to be bullied while you are working your way up?" suggested Pryn. "You are ambitious, young man."

"Is any one good for anything who is not ambitious?" asked Henry.

"That is true enough," replied Pryn, "and I daresay you are as competent as you say; there is intelligence in your face, and a little of the devil-may-care disposition is not amiss in your profession."

"What do you mean," asked Henry, "by saying that if a man does not get on, it is his own fault?"

Pryn made no reply; so intently was he studying the face of the young scamp before him, that the question passed as though he heard it not.

"And so," said he, after a pause, "you consider yourself fit to hold a certificate as master; could you now navigate a vessel that was intrusted to your charge?"

"Of course I could," replied Henry; "but how does it rest with one's self to get on? I am sure I have never yet had my chance in life."

"Henry Lancefield," said Mr Pryn, impressively, "there are two descriptions of persons to whom success in life is generally the reward: the one are those who patiently and slowly plod on through difficulties, until they arrive, step by step, at the objects they aim at; the others are those

bolder spirits who overleap obstacles, and may be said to take fortune by storm."

"If I am ever to arrive at any good fortune," observed Henry, "it must be in the latter way, for I have not patience to plod on step by step."

"But suppose," pursued the other, "that a chance was to come in your way involving something of risk and danger, what would you say then?"

"I would say, give me the chance; risk and danger are nothing."

Mr Pryn smiled a peculiar smile. "Come out and dine with me at Westleigh," said he, "and we will have some more conversation."

Henry went, and the result of that evening's conference was, that Pryn gave him the command of the *Southern Cross*.

When Gerald was informed of what had been done, he expressed the greatest surprise. "That ill-conditioned scamp!" he exclaimed.

"He is not an ill-conditioned scamp," retorted Pryn, sharply; "he is a most intelligent young man."

Gerald shrugged his shoulders.

"And I'll tell you what, Bright, for your own sake you had better put about no reports disparaging to Henry Lancefield. Trust me that I know what I am about."

CHAPTER XX.

THE business of the day was over, and Gerald, who had been engaged in the stores during the afternoon, returned to the office to see Pryn before riding home. As he crossed the yard he met Henry Lancefield, who had just come out of the office. "Do you stick to your intention of sailing to-morrow?" he asked.

"Yes," was the reply, "we shall get under weigh at daylight."

"I wish you were well back instead of going," observed Gerald; adding, after a moment's pause, "you have a considerable weight of responsibility on your shoulders, Lancefield."

"They are not unfitted to bear it, I hope," Henry answered, in a tone of bold, undoubting confidence; "I have received my instructions, and I know how to act on them; you may depend on me."

"Success to the voyage, then," said Gerald, holding out his hand. They shook hands and parted—the one quitting the premises, and the other entering the house. It was getting late, and the large business room which Gerald passed through was empty. The clerks had left, but Pryn himself always remained the last, and he was accordingly found in the private room within the office, and to judge

by his attitude and looks, had no more thoughts of moving than if it had not been already close upon his dinner hour. Seated in one of the deep morocco-covered easy-chairs, he was sunk in thought, and his marked, expressive features revealed a train of anxious, even troubled, reflection. His partner's entrance startled him.

"Time to shut up shop, is it not?" said Gerald.

"I suppose it is," answered Pryn, rising and looking at his watch. For the next few minutes he moved somewhat restlessly about the room, opened and closed again one or two drawers, and all without any apparent object. "Lancefield has been here," he observed at length; "you have just missed him."

"I met him at the door," replied Gerald. "So they intend to weigh anchor to-morrow?"

"Yes, there is nothing now to detain them; had you any conversation with him?"

"Nothing particular, for I was in a hurry."

"It is a pity," said Pryn, "that you did not come in a few minutes sooner; it would have been more satisfactory both to me and to Lancefield, though of course he knows we are one and the same here, and instructions from one are from both of us."

"I suppose you did without me very well," replied Gerald; "for I have had very little voice in this all along; it is your speculation, Pryn."

"My speculation! what do you mean by that?" asked Pryn, sharply; "your liability is the same as mine."

"Of course I am liable, but I mean that it is your hobby; it was not my doing to buy an old tub and insure

her at such a high premium, and I never would have put that young chap into her as skipper."

"Well, she is well insured," observed Pryn; "so we are safe in the event of anything happening."

"Oh, I am not particularly nervous," said Gerald; "for I believe that Lancefield understands navigation pretty well, and he may be more careful than others who are more experienced. It was a rare chance for him, getting command of a vessel before he had even been through the usual gradations of service, and he must feel that all his prospects depend on him doing well in this."

"It is a ticklish thing, however, to navigate among those coral islands," said Pryn; "a very little carelessness, or mistake in the reckoning, and they might get ashore upon a reef, and it would not be bad for us if they did."

"The loss of a vessel is a very serious thing," observed Gerald; "I cannot call it otherwise than *bad*, under any circumstances."

"The fact is," answered Pryn, "that the present aspect of our affairs is bad too. Now, if what I am supposing was to happen, we would get the insurance money—a round, handsome sum—down. It would enable us to meet those confounded bills which will be falling due; and, in a word, put us all square."

"You would think little enough, then," said Gerald, coldly, "of the loss of so many poor fellows' lives?"

"Hold hard, Bright," exclaimed Pryn; "don't take me for a ruffian. If there was the smallest risk of life, I would not speak as I am doing; but, bless me! the crew we have are as much at home among the coral islands as you

and I are in this room ; there is nothing they would enjoy more than a spell there of a week or two ; they would have nothing to do, and be as merry as crickets."

"We can think of all that," said Gerald, "when the thing happens."

"Unless," said the other, hesitating, "it were possible—I wonder, now, if we could—you understand—give Lancefield a hint?"

"Why, that is a thing," replied Gerald, "which even in jest we must not speak of."

"Pooh ! nonsense, man," exclaimed Pryn ; "in jest one may surely speak of anything ; and I was only saying, what a go it would be."

"A go, with a vengeance," said Gerald.

"No doubt it is a desperate sort of thing," resumed Pryn, "but not quite so much so as it appears at first. There would be no risk of life, as I was saying ; it would only be doing the underwriters a little, and they," he added, with a forced laugh, "have often done us."

"I don't know, indeed, what grounds or right you have to say so," said Gerald.

"Well, at all events they can well afford to lose," said Pryn, impatiently ; "they take the risk always of having to pay, and it is only making their chance into a certainty for once ; while, on the other hand, if our affairs go to the wall, think how many will be the sufferers with us ; your excellent wife, my innocent children, my poor sister, whose money is in a great measure involved with us ; all this would be saved. I declare, I can't help thinking about it."

"Good heavens! is it possible that you are speaking seriously?" exclaimed Gerald, for the first time taking in the drift of his partner's discourse; "if so, drop the idea, once and for ever. Why, it would be a matter for transportation; transportation, do I say? it would be a hanging matter, for every soul connected with it."

"Hanging! no, no, by Jove!" said Pryn, "not so bad as that; don't run ahead, Bright."

It may be observed that the first impulse of Gerald's horror was not indignation at the crime proposed, but rather dread of the exposure and punishment likely to follow; and this did not escape the keen observation of Pryn, who saw in this worldly spirit an instrument very likely to accomplish his wishes. "I do not think," said he, "that there would be much danger of detection, for on that coast wrecks are so liable to occur; but if anything did lead to suspicion, and we were likely to be brought up after obtaining the money, we should have nothing to do but to slope with the tin to California."

"And leave behind us a name for ever blackened in the world," cried Gerald, impetuously. Even while he spoke, an internal voice seemed to whisper that there is something beyond this world's opinion which is yet more to be dreaded; an unseen future, for which, in spite of himself, he was living, whose memorial of deeds good or evil would be immortal.

To many a wrong and mercenary transaction had Gerald in the course of business within the last two years lent himself, but this, as it were, crowning piece of dishonesty, was a step for which he was not prepared; the very worldliness

of Pryn's arguments, appealing undisguisedly to his self-interest, revealed to him the baseness of those motives by which he had been hitherto actuated ; he refused to lend an ear to anything his partner could urge, and at length, declaring he would not listen to another word upon the subject, in high displeasure he quitted the office.

It was the greatest relief when, the following day, he read the name of the *Southern Cross* in the list of departures, with that of Henry Lancefield, commander.

Gerald returned next day to the office, reluctant to meet Pryn, dreading a renewal of the late discussion. The departure of the vessel had, indeed, settled the point, and rendered argument on either side useless ; but he knew well that Pryn was not a man to bear with temper being balked in any of his projects, and he judged, with reason, that he must have been considerably bent on this plot before he could have brought himself to give it a tangible shape in words.

Contrary to his expectation, however, his partner met him without any signs of ill humour or disappointment ; his manner was serene and cordial, more so than usual ; he seemed entirely occupied with the business of the day, and made no reference to what had passed. Neither that day, nor any other time, did he by hint or word allude to it, until Gerald began almost to ask himself whether the conversation which he shrunk even from remembering was a fiction of his own imagination, a painful and unpleasant dream, so entirely did it appear to have passed from the recollection of the other. And ere long it faded from his mind also, absorbed as he was in subjects of pressing and present

anxiety which now day by day began to crowd round Gerald's path, and soon monopolised all his thoughts. Whether or not we can suppose that the very suggestion of a project so infamous could bring with it something like a curse, certain it is that from that date the affairs of Bright and Pryn began to go from bad to worse; difficulties which hitherto had loomed in the distance suddenly seemed to threaten near at hand, speculations on which they most securely reckoned turned out badly, and they foresaw with apprehension bills becoming due when they had no means to meet them. Then did Gerald for the first time know the anxiety and harassment of a merchant's life, so often pronounced an easy path, because remote from the hardships of more active professions, and yet as infinitely more wearing, as mental trials exceed those which are merely physical.

During this trying period the character of the two partners seemed for the time to be curiously reversed; Pryn, who generally was either unduly elated by good fortune or proportionably depressed when things went wrong, showed now a serenity and equanimity which Gerald could only marvel at, and by no means imitate.

"When things are at the worst, Bright," he would say, "they always mend. Don't be down-hearted, the *Southern Cross* will be in directly, and see if we don't make a profit then that will put us all square."

"We don't so much as know of her safe arrival at her destination yet," Gerald would reply, gloomily.

"So much the better," said Pryn; "at present there is rather a glut of our article in the market, there will be time to raise the demand again."

By such representations did Mr Pryn strive to cheer his partner; and as one after another of their speculations failed, this one increased in importance in their eyes, until at length that little vessel, tossing on the distant sea, became the centre of all their hopes, the point to which their most anxious gaze was directed.

But even the sanguine conversation of Pryn could not always impart confidence to Gerald; he was too unused to trouble; his habitual cheerfulness was too merely the effect of circumstances and natural temper, unfounded on those trusting principles which alone can sustain the mind in adversity, to save him now from the deepest despondency. He saw, indeed, the necessity of disguising his uneasiness as the only chance of maintaining the stability of the firm; but the very effort was an additional tax on his mind, for which he paid the penalty in private; he lost his rest, his appetite, became pale, harassed in looks, and irritable in temper. As many in his circumstances may bear witness to having done before, he at times would seek in society to throw off his load of care, by entering with more avidity than usual into amusements which now brought him no enjoyment; but oftener, when office hours were over, he would quietly return home, not to companionise with Inda, but to sit in gloomy reverie, without breaking silence by the hour together, seeing in the threatening future before him nothing but a long vista of trials, embarrassment, and disgrace, ending in the insolvent court. Thus many an evening was unsocially spent, in almost silence on his part, while his wife quietly pursued some piece of needlework, after having once or twice vainly attempted to lead him

into conversation, or proposed some book for him to read aloud; though as often as his eyes rested on her calm sweet face, the thought would pass through his mind that there might be a comfort in imparting his anxieties to her, and receiving, if not counsel in his difficulties, at least sympathy and the relief of unburdening his mind; for Gerald had an idea that man was intended to find a friend in his wife, a confidant, a participator in all his thoughts—of his sorrows as well as his happiness, and the most needed and valued in hours of adversity. But this was rather a picture drawn by his imagination of what might be in the case of another, than a belief that he could ever find such a friend in his partner; for, if the truth be told, a dread of Lucinda mingled strongly with his fears of his affairs going wrong, and not a little aggravated his trials in the prospect. Many may do wrong, and the world blame them; yet at home, even for their faults, they meet with pity and love; but in his wife he believed he possessed the harshest judge of all. This was the unfortunate consequence of their first quarrel. To all appearance the breach between them had been long quite healed; Lucinda was uniformly complying, gentle, and considerate towards him; still he retained a vivid recollection of the severity with which she had at the time resented his faults of duplicity and concealment; and should it be necessary to disclose to her that his own imprudence had entangled his affairs to the verge of ruin, he foresaw a recurrence of those cold averted looks, and brief though cutting speeches.

"Inda," said Gerald, abruptly, one evening, "how much changed you are in looks since we first came here. I don't

mean in any uncomplimentary sense, but you are not like the same girl."

A faint flush at the remark tinged Lucinda's complexion, where colonial paleness had taken the place of the roses she brought from England. It was true, she was very different from what she had been, although the change had probably been very gradually taking place before his eyes until it thus accidentally struck him. Inda had been married at an age when the appearance is not matured; she had come to the colony a girl, unformed in that respect as in every other, and there was ample room for Gerald's remark; the slender figure which, when she left England, looked so tall and stiff as if unused to the height but lately attained, had gained much in roundness and proportion; the features, which then expressed little save a rather insipid sweetness, had now acquired a graver, more womanly cast; her smiles were not so ready on every trivial occasion, but more full of meaning when they came. Nor were her manners less changed, the graceful self-possession of which was very different from the abruptness or formal reserve between which they had before alternated, when, unused to the world, she was ill at ease among strangers. Gerald thought of all this, and drew these comparisons while she sat opposite to him quietly pursuing her work. But a change more important, which Gerald could not trace, and greater than Inda was perhaps herself aware of, had been also taking place within her during the last few years; a gradual development of character, to which the circumstances of her life, peculiar and seemingly unfavourable as they were, had contributed. In her quiet

daily routine, seldom diversified by intercourse with strangers, she had abundant leisure for reading and reflection; her various accomplishments occupied her less than formerly, nor did she continue to store her mind with dates and remarkable events; but if she read history less, she read her Bible more, and what was better, she thought of about what she read. Hers was no longer the unsubdued will, submissive only from the habits of education, nor the proud, independent temper which had revolted from her husband on the first occasion of his offending her; but she sought for, and obtained, "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit;" she was ready for the performance of any duty, because her mind was habitually fixed on objects which lay beyond the horizon of this world.

CHAPTER XXI.

ANY day now, the partners were in the habit of saying to each other, the *Southern Cross* might come in; they would probably hear nothing of her until she appeared in harbour; nevertheless, day by day Pryn glanced nervously at the heap of letters on the office table, lest perchance among the addresses might be one in the scrawling, unformed hand of Henry Lancefield; and each day his inquisitive look was followed by an expression of almost relief as none such appeared. Pryn had gone out on business for a short time one afternoon, and Gerald was alone in the office, when five strangers presented themselves at the half-open door, and a gruff voice inquired, "Is this the office of Bright and Pryn?"

Gerald went forward. "Yes," said he, "I am the senior partner; what do you want?"

The men were sailors, their garments were dilapidated, and their weatherbeaten countenances bore every trace of recent hardship. "We want our wages paid for one thing," said they; "and have to report the loss of the *Southern Cross*."

"The *Southern Cross*!" repeated Gerald, aghast; "do you mean to say she is wrecked?"

"Went ashore," was the reply, "on the 20th of last month."

"And the rest of the crew?" inquired Gerald, anxiously.

"All hands saved—that is, unless the savages on the islands make short work with them; and they are a wild lot there."

"The skipper," observed another of the men, "seemed pretty well done up as it was; he is tougher than he looks if he gets over that night's work."

Gerald leaned against the door-post, unable for a moment to utter a question. "How did it happen?" he then asked; "had you very bad weather?"

"Never finer winds blew out of heaven," was the reply, shortly.

There was something peculiar in the tone of the men, a mixture of almost insolence and of reserve, which struck Gerald, and suggested the idea that they were keeping back something. "Speak out, my men," said he, impatiently; "have you reason to suppose there was any carelessness on the part of Captain Lancefield?"

"Carelessness, or worse," was the reply; the last word was said in a suppressed voice, but before Gerald could speak, one of the sailors produced a letter, crumpled and stained by sea-water, and handing it to him, observed, "This will maybe tell you as much as you want to know."

The letter was addressed to Pryn; but Gerald, recognising the handwriting of Henry Lancefield, opened it without hesitation. Another note fell out as he did so; he picked it up, and finding it directed to the firm, read as follows:—

"DEAR SIRs,—I regret to be obliged to inform you of the loss of your vessel *Southern Cross*, which went ashore on a coral reef on the night of the 20th ultimo, in lat. —, long. —. As she broke up almost immediately, all my efforts to save any part of the cargo were, I am sorry to say, unavailing. I trust you will find means of sending to our relief as soon as possible, as we are entirely without means of getting away from here.—Your obedient servant,

"HENRY LANCEFIELD."

"To do the skipper justice," observed one of the seamen, as Gerald paused after reading this formal intimation, "he was in no hurry to save himself; the long-boat would not hold above half of us, and he took his chance of being picked up by some other vessel, or of your sending to fetch him and the rest away."

"He wasn't well fit to move," said another; "he stuck by the wreck till she broke up, then was washed on shore, and must have come with considerable violence against the rocks; when we left, he was lying under a tarpaulin more dead than alive."

Gerald felt himself turn perfectly faint as he thought of this young man whose life had probably been thus forfeited, and hesitated as he held in his hand the note addressed to Pryn, which might possibly contain some more particulars; but this was no moment to mince matters, so tearing open the coarse wafer which fastened it, he ran his eye over the contents. They were in a very different strain from the former:—

"Here we are, and I suppose you hardly meant any-

thing quite so bad by us as the plight we are in. I hope you will send as soon as possible and get us away from here, for we have no means of doing anything. Some of the crew are going off in the long boat ; the rest of us must stay here, with the chance of being murdered any day by the savages, if we do not die first of exposure and starvation. I can scarcely write, I am all bruised, and have a devil of a cough. I would to God you had never made me that tempting offer ; it has ruined me, soul and body both ! ”

Gerald dwelt for some minutes over these expressions. “ This is a very extraordinary letter,” said he, half aloud ; suddenly an idea struck him, too horrible to put into words ; he remembered a certain conversation with Pryn ; he remembered some words of Henry’s, “ I have received my instructions, and I know how to act by them,” the night before the vessel sailed, when he met him for a moment ; these seemed now to bear a peculiar significance ; he dreaded having the suspicion confirmed by questioning the men, so cutting short his own meditations, he said abruptly, “ We shall certainly send to their relief without delay ; I shall advise with my partner the instant he returns ; in the meantime come in here, and I will pay you your wages.”

He took them into the private room of the office, referred to the books for what was due to them, paid their wages, then, after a momentary hesitation, took out an extra sum which he gave to each, saying, “ Here, my poor fellows, this is but small compensation for all you have undergone.”

The men took it, exchanged a glance among themselves, and as they walked away he heard one mutter, "This looks rather like hush-money."

As soon as he was alone, Gerald dropped into a chair, and covered his face with his hands.

He was roused by the entrance of his partner; he started up, and interrupting Pryn's indifferent remark, exclaimed, "Have you heard the news? the dreadful news, of the *Southern Cross*?"

Pryn stood still, and his very breath seemed suspended, while the other added, "Wrecked! gone ashore!"

Pryn's agitation was greater than even Gerald's had been; he turned perfectly livid, but contrived to falter out the words, "What a lucky chance; we shall benefit by the insurance."

"Lucky! do you say?" exclaimed Gerald; "here is Lancefield all but dead, and we have to answer for it. Pryn, I would rather have lost all I possessed than that this had happened."

At that instant Pryn's eye fell on the letters open on the table; his face changed, and darting towards them, he exclaimed, in an excited tone, "What is this, Bright? you have been opening letters addressed to me!"

Gerald, however, laid his hand on the papers. "Letters," said he, sternly, "relating to the affairs of the firm, are addressed equally to both partners; Pryn, there has been foul play in this, and you know it." He seized his partner's arm as he spoke with a grasp in which Pryn shook like an aspen leaf. "Tell me the truth," said Gerald; "you knew this would happen?"

Pryn attempted to utter the monosyllable; "No," but his teeth were chattering in their sockets, and as if fascinated, he faltered, "Yes."

"I have been deceived, tampered with," pursued Gerald, "but I will know the worst now—you gave instructions to Lancefield?"

Pryn did not in general want either genuine courage or effrontery, but the cowardice of detected guilt was on him now, and his whole nature seemed to succumb before the passionate resolution of his partner to know everything. Gerald wrung a confession from him—what a confession it was!—that he had instructed Lancefield to lose the vessel; that in the conversation recorded the night before she sailed, he had intended to inform Gerald of what he had done, but finding him so opposed to the idea, deemed it best to keep his own counsel.

A frightful scene ensued,—it is difficult even to imagine such taking place in any Sydney merchant's office. We trust, and doubt not, that Mr Pryn is an unique specimen of his class. When poor Gerald heard all, he threw himself into a chair, and groaned aloud.

Pryn turned his back upon him; whether he hid his face for shame we do not know, but at last Gerald was conscious of his voice beside him. "Come, Bright, don't take it in this way; I may have made a mistake, but I did it for the best; I don't believe Lancefield will be a fig the worse."

Gerald interrupted, "You have ruined that young chap," said he, in a tone of desperate calmness, "as he says himself, soul and body."

"No, no," repeated Pryn, again; "and just consider how we were situated, a little ready money was an imperative necessity."

This remark diverted Gerald's consideration, which had hitherto been absorbed in contemplation of the crime in which he had become involuntarily a participator, to the consequences it was likely to entail upon himself; and he shuddered as he thought of all that might lie before him. "If you allude," said he, "to the insurance, I will not have an attempt made to get it. This affair dissolves our partnership."

"Well, well, you shall have everything your own way, only believe that if we are prudent all may end well."

"The end," said Gerald, bitterly, "is what neither of us see at present. Do you suppose," he continued, again exciting himself, "that the underwriters will not look into this? Why, every appearance is against us; those sailors, it is quite evident, suspect something."

"The sailors," exclaimed Pryn, as if struck with a sudden thought, "their mouths must be stopped." And without his hat he was rushing to the door.

Gerald caught hold of him. "Don't lose your head," said he.

Pryn waited a moment, made an effort to recover some appearance of composure, then put on his hat and walked decorously from the office.

After a two hours' walk in the sun he returned, worn and agitated, to say that no traces of the sailors could he find.

The following morning there appeared in several of the

papers an intimation to the effect, that if the five seamen who had called the previous day at the office of Bright and Pryn would present themselves there again they would hear of something to their advantage. The artifice by which they thus endeavoured to communicate with the men, in order to bribe or threaten them into giving the evidence they wished if called as witnesses, was too entirely of a piece with the mode in which this firm had conducted business, for the crookedness of the policy to excite any wonder. But the best efforts of self-interest to hush up the affair were unavailing; whether the sailors *peached*, or the circumstances of the loss were alone sufficient to demand investigation, suspicion was excited, and the underwriters awaited only the arrival of the remainder of the ship's company to bring an indictment against Bright and Pryn.

It would be difficult to say whether this threatened prosecution threw into greatest consternation the innocent or the guilty partner. Gerald had indeed the consolation of knowing that in this case he was morally innocent; but the insurance had been effected in the name of the firm, and he was uncertain how far it is in the power of one partner to involve another. From Pryn he knew he need look for neither justice nor generosity; and the best that he saw before him was trouble and disgrace. Pryn, on the other hand, dreaded having to bear the whole brunt of the impending storm alone, and was apprehensive lest Gerald should take it into his head to turn evidence against him. And all this they had to bear amid the horrors of impending bankruptcy!

Once again the two partners sat together in their office room—that room where so many an evil project had been hatched, but with which their connexion was now soon to cease. The play was worked out; they no longer could continue as merchants. But as yet their position was known only to themselves; it was the day of calm preceding the storm. They were not conversing, for what could they say? but Gerald looked at the pale countenance opposite to him, and remembered bitterly how wilfully he had selected that man as his friend. “I would to Heaven I had never seen your face!” he thought. “You have ruined me, both in my fortunes and in my character!” The very intensity of the reflection gave it expression in words; unconsciously he spoke aloud.

“If I have ruined you,” answered Pryn, “I have ruined myself equally.”

Sick at heart, Gerald at last rose and walked down the street towards his brother-in-law’s office. That night, he decided, he must inform Lucinda of the state of his affairs; and he bethought himself, before doing so, of opening his mind to Mr Milner, who, perhaps, might give him some counsel or encouragement that should nerve him for the effort. He found his brother-in-law alone, seated in a small parlour, into which the afternoon sun was steadily pouring. It was the hour at which not much is doing in the way of business, and Mr Milner was reading a newspaper. He received Gerald with marked coldness, and allowed him to take a seat without laying aside his paper.

“Milner,” said Gerald, after a pause, during which the

other continued to read, "I do not know which way to turn; I hardly dare look my own position in the face; I want to talk to you."

Mr Milner threw down his paper. "There are strange rumours afloat, Gerald," said he, severely; and then they spoke.

CHAPTER XXII.

PERHAPS his own domestic affliction had, unknown to himself, somewhat embittered Mr Milner's temper, and left him with less of the milk of human kindness than usual ; for when Gerald thus sought him as a comforter, and confided to him unreservedly, both the condition of his affairs and his reluctance to make the disclosure to Lucinda, he did not give him that sympathy which could alone have soothed his mind in the harassed state it then was. Without making light of the errors Gerald had committed, he might have pointed out to him in his distress that he yet was so young that the past might be retrieved by a future course of uprightness ; have assured him that if he did well, although summer friends might look coldly when he no longer had wealth to make his house attractive, those who were worth anything would regard him the same as ever ; and, reminding him of the generosity which Inda had shown on more than one occasion, have encouraged him to tell her openly everything, nor fear any harshness from her. But he did nothing of the kind ; from the proud height of his own rectitude he rather expatiated with indignation on his brother-in-law's imprudence, dwelling upon it with a severity which, however beneficial it might have been at another time in pulling down some

of Gerald's superabundant self-sufficiency, could at present have no other effect than that of irritating a mind already too distracted to draw any salutary lesson from the best advice, or even from misfortune itself. He said not, indeed, one word but what was true and just; as usual, he was just, but he was not kind. Would the world, Gerald anxiously asked, say he had forfeited his character as an honest man? He had confessed himself, was the reply, that all considerations had lately been allowed to merge in the desire to make money, and the world certainly always judges rather more severely than occasion demands than too leniently. How would Lucinda take it? would she be very much displeased? Probably she would; and if she were, it was only what he deserved.

More unhappy than before, if possible, and with a dread of Lucinda, increased by the result of this call, Gerald sadly took his way home. As he approached the drawing-room, he heard his wife conversing with some one within, and felt relieved to think that the presence of a third person must defer the confession for the meantime. The strange voice was that of Mr Towers, who did not allow the distance which existed between himself and Gerald to prevent him occasionally calling on Lucinda. To-day there were few persons whom Gerald would not have been in reality glad to see; but his manner was remarkably abrupt to his visitor, for after exchanging a few words, he affected to have only come to fetch something, and prepared, without apology, to leave the room.

"Don't go, Gerald," Lucinda began. "I want you to hear"——

"I can't stay," was the reply; "my horse is waiting below."

Inda went after him, and detained him at the top of the stairs. "Cannot you stop one minute? I want to tell you"——

"Don't bother me," said he; "I have an appointment;" and he ran down-stairs.

He re-mounted, and, indifferent in what direction he went, proceeded, from old habit, along the South Head road, where he had the custom of riding nearly every afternoon. But when he had left behind him the last straggling houses on the outskirts of the town, he perceived at a little distance a cavalcade of ladies and gentlemen, and being little in a mood to exchange the commonplace greetings of society, he turned his horse's head, and crossed the bush towards Bondi Bay. Through the brush-wood and loose soil which at every step sunk his horse over the hoofs, and through the masses of rock on the beach, he made his way on to the broad sands beneath, which gave the full expanse of the ocean to his view, where, slackening the rein, he gave himself up to the misery of reflection on his situation in the undisturbed solitude of the hour and place.

These reflections were indeed most miserable, and it seemed almost strange to be in circumstances so altered and with such different feelings in a spot he knew so well; for times without number had he ridden there, when the sun shone with the same warmth above and the sea dashed its breakers on the sandy beach with the same roar and sparkle, when fortune had smiled upon him as well as the

skies, and all his prospects been as fair as that before him. It had been the direction of one of his earliest rides with Inda when they had been married but a few months, and he was showing her all the pretty spots around the new home to which he had brought her; then pleased with each other and with everything, they had loitered by the sea, and in mere absence of thought or anxiety watched with delight the waves throw up their foam, and he had gathered flowers from the steep places of the rocks for her. In his happy boyhood, too, this spot, as well as every other within many miles of his home, had been familiar in those long independent rambles schoolboys love to take, and by the sea had been formed and revelled in many of those daydreams for the future which he had ever so vainly and fondly indulged; dreams of wealth and of distinction, and, more vague and indistinct, dreams of virtuous attainment, and a benevolence which was to make many happy. But where were those visions now, when their fulfilment should begin to be looked for? the seed-time had been rich in promise, but where was the harvest? The world was the furrow in which he had planted, and the world had paid him, as she does all who trust in her, by bringing forth no fruit in season. And worldly reverses such as he had sustained possessed for a mind which worshipped the idols he worshipped a bitterness of sting which, however severe, they could not have contained for any other. Had it been only the failure of a speculative business, we must suppose him capable of bearing it with fortitude, since we have seen him voluntarily relinquish a ready-made fortune to earn a provision by his own exertions. But the sudden reverse, as it came, implied

the certain deprivation of that position which against every disadvantage of name and of connexion he had attained for himself, lessened consideration among his fellow-men, all he had lived for, and when they had gone he felt that all was gone. There is no earthly misery of which the precious talisman of human sympathy may not in some degree charm away the sense, which, as long as remains the friendship of *some one* who will love you still, may not be borne; but Gerald had not that balm, there was on the wide earth *no one* to whom, with all his faults and follies, he could turn in confidence of their forgiveness and their love. His mother, into whose faithful breast he had ever poured forth his childish griefs, was long since laid in her quiet grave; and if from that abode, wherever it may be, where those who die in faith await their final recompense, she could look down on her unhappy son, it was but to pity without power to relieve him; his sister was a wanderer he knew not where; his stern brother-in-law, whose high character had been his earliest pattern and guide, had accused him to his face, and set an example which all his acquaintances would follow; and Lucinda—if she threw him off, but no, that last drop in the cup of bitterness he could not bear; and he felt as if rather than encounter it, he could in that hour, by an act of his own free will, put an end to his troubles for ever.

As the dire thought of suicide flashed on his brain it brought with it an exulting gleam of relief, but it was such a ray as the worst enemy sends to light his victim more surely to himself; he dismounted and hung his bridle loosely over a bough, he stroked caressingly the glossy neck

of his horse. "We have been out many an hour together," said he, "but you are mine no longer, you will have to go with everything else I possess." These last words were rather groaned through his set teeth than spoken, for they represented the sum of his ruin and disgrace,—that disgrace which he feared more than crime, and to escape which he contemplated hurrying himself from this world, to give an account, all unprepared as he was, of the misspent years of his youth! He climbed the summit of a rock, and looked down on where the water was deep and clear; it was so clear that the reflection of the skies and rocks was perfectly defined, and the pebbly bottom might almost be discerned, but he knew it was very deep. Then he gazed round on the scene he might never behold again, noting, as if in a last farewell, every characteristic and form of beauty. One attached by long association to the climate and landscapes of England might perhaps have missed the tempered skies and greener foliage of his own country beneath the scorching sun and unclouded heaven of that summer's day; but not so the young Australian, who saw only in each object its appropriate beauty. The tide was coming in, but not fast, the waves rolled slowly and heavily one over the other until they broke upon the beach; others, checked by the rocks, sent high their spray, which, falling like a fountain through the sunny air, reflected a rainbow in every drop; the young leaves of the green trees—for it was early in the season—glittered in the sunlight with the brightness of emeralds, as they waved on their long slender stalks in the gentle breeze, which was unheard and perceptible only by the freshness of the atmosphere and the graceful motion com-

municated to boughs and herbage. A place so calm and lonely was the very one for Gerald to carry out his design ; but there was something in the very tranquillity of all around which arrested him, as he made a motion to throw off his coat ; it seemed as if a scene so remote from the busy whirl of mortal life lay especially in the keeping of its Maker ; as if the deep calm eye of Heaven which looked down on it looked also upon him, saw into his heart with all its wild passions, ungoverned will, and human griefs, and the thoughts of sin which then existed.

"Yes," said Gerald, "all nature is at peace with herself ; man alone is a discord amid the fair harmony of the rest. So soon as, acting after the devices of his own heart, he despises to walk humbly with his God, and seeking the things of time and sense, neglects the apostolic, Divine commandment to 'love not the world nor the things which are in the world,' does he lose that just place amid created beings where unerring wisdom has ordained him to find his happiness, and becomes but the prey of his own delusions !"

As he stood upon the narrow rock, which was all that rested betwixt him and eternity, with his soul by various passions almost rent, he thought—but as well might we try to note the atoms which the force of the storm or whirlwind carries by, as to separate the crowd of thoughts which rushed through his brain. But we may suppose that he thought of his past life, of his mother's lessons, her life of meek resignation to sorrow as great as any he could feel, and her death-bed of peace and hope ; of conversations he had held with Margaret, and of his own many talents wasted and golden opportunities abused ; but he was not left wholly to

himself, but by mercy was upheld in that fierce conflict between the Tempter and the Spirit of Grace.

It was late when he reached home, he purposely let it be so, and he had only time to make a hasty toilet and join Lucinda, who was already dressed, in the drawing-room.

During dinner, while the servants were present, there could of course be nothing but commonplace conversation ; but when the cloth was withdrawn and they were alone, then came the time of trial. In spite of his attempts to speak on indifferent subjects, Lucinda had marked his abstracted, restless countenance, and her inquiry whether he was unwell or had anything vexing him, gave him an opening that he could not let pass, and all, at least as far as related to pecuniary embarrassments, was divulged.

What was Gerald's surprise, instead of the reception he had pictured, to receive from Lucinda only the most affectionate sympathy, unimbittered by a single expression of reproach, any more than if the misfortune was unmerited on his part. Nor was it the comfort of mere sympathy that she was able to afford him ; but Gerald then for the first time appreciated what it is to have a wife of superior understanding and judgment. Because he felt confused beneath the agitation of the day, and because his temples throbbed and his head ached, so that he could scarcely think, therefore she thought for him ; she led him from the inactive contemplation of his troubles to seek for a practical remedy, made light of the luxuries they must give up, spoke cheerfully of dividing with him the burden of his cares, and finally proposed that, since the circum-

stances of his failure made it desirable that his future occupation should be elsewhere than in Sydney, he should wind up his affairs as soon as possible, and consider the expediency of removing to the bush, and there endeavour to make that honest livelihood which in this favoured country almost any who desires it may obtain.

"But," said Gerald, "in the bush one must have something to begin with, unless you mean that I should take subordinate employment on another man's station; for having a run of my own is out of the question, as, there is no use putting a false colouring on the matter, at this day I am a beggar!"

"No, not so," said Lucinda, "for we still have Mr Pryce's legacy; and about that, Gerald, I have a piece of good news to tell you. I daresay you have been lately too much absorbed in your own business to know that the land we invested it in has very much risen in value; the proposed railway is to cut through that part, and the company offer three times what we paid for our allotments. It was of this that Mr Towers called to speak to-day, when I would have told you, only you were in such haste."

"And that was your speculation," cried Gerald; "how differently it has turned out!"

"But I do not say for that reason," answered Lucinda, sweetly, "that you were wrong and I was right; we cannot always judge of the result of speculations. At the time you had probably as good reason to suppose your own good, and they promised more brilliantly; let us only be thankful that we have something to depend on." She rose as she spoke. "As soon as we get the money I mean to make

it unreservedly over to you, to do with whatever you think best ; and now I will leave you, dearest, a little while, as I daresay you will like to think over plans by yourself."

She was turning away, but Gerald, who, while she spoke, had looked at her with a mixture of astonishment and admiration, caught her hand, and drawing her towards him, exclaimed, in a tone which not weakness, but the emotion of real feeling rendered almost tremulous, "Inda, you are too noble a creature to be the wife of such a man as me ! But would you," he resumed, after a pause, "trust all you have to depend on in the hands of a person who ruins everything he touches ? But no, I am not vain now, I know myself to be a fool, unable to manage even, my own affairs."

"Gerald," exclaimed Lucinda, "do not blame yourself so—that I cannot bear ; your errors have arisen from a misguided confidence, quite remote from the deficiency you impute to yourself. Profit by the past, and you will become all that, in the pride of untried strength, you believed yourself."

And tears, for the first time since the commencement of the conversation, filled her eyes, while she stooped to press her lips on the flushed, burning forehead of her then humble, penitent husband.

He sat silent for a long time, and at last said, with a steadiness which seemed but the suppression of strong feeling, "I see, Lucinda, what we must do ; when I look back upon the past I feel ashamed to think of what my conduct has all along been ; when we married, I deceived you as to my family, and persuaded you to accompany me

to the colony under a false impression of the position you were to occupy here ; but I did not for a moment imagine that I was bringing you to encounter poverty as well as other trials, and I cannot bear that you should partake of the struggles which are no more than I deserve. Happily, this money secures you a competence ; you must return to England ; your excellent mother will give you a home, and when I may be again in a position to warrant it, you will believe with what pleasure I shall ask you to rejoin me."

"And do you suppose," replied Lucinda, "that I think so lightly of the vows I took to you at the altar that I will consent to leave you at a time when I can most be a comfort to you? No, I will abide by your fortunes. If you choose to remain in Sydney, I will do what I can to assist you ; I daresay I can make some money by teaching different things ; or if you prefer to go to the bush—which I think the preferable plan—I will equally readily accompany you."

"I am unworthy of such love," sighed Gerald ; "but it would never do for you to be buried in the bush ; you would never be contented there."

"I could be contented—more, happy—whenever I saw you so, even though we had to live in a bark hut, and on beef and damper."

"It would not come to that," replied Gerald ; "if—but I have not told you the worst yet, Inda ; there is a trial hanging over my head."

"A trial !" repeated Lucinda.

"Yes. Bankruptcy is not the full extent of my misfortunes. Pryn has involved me, unknown to myself, in an

affair which makes us liable to a prosecution. I do not mean to say," he hurriedly continued, "that I have been guiltless in any particular since the day I entered into business; but of this transaction I did know nothing, and never would have given my sanction to it; still, it may be difficult to prove that one partner really knew nothing of the proceedings of the other, and how the case may be viewed by a jury, Heaven only knows." Then, in as few words as possible, but clearly, and not attempting to keep anything back, he told her the story of the *Southern Cross*. "And now," said he, in conclusion, "what will you say if you have a convict for your husband?"

Here was, indeed, a blow for poor Inda. By a noble mind, poverty may be borne; loss of friends may be borne—but disgrace! Gerald read her feelings in her rapid change of colour, and he almost expected her to withdraw from him; but she did not; she hid her face in an agony of shame, but she hid it against his shoulder. After a moment, during which he felt her tears drop upon his hands, she raised her head. "I don't think it will come to that," said she; "as you are innocent, a jury must surely find you so; I cannot believe there will be any difficulty about that."

"I think so too," said he, "on the whole."

"So let us suppose the trial well over," pursued Inda, again striving to cheer him, "and talk about our bush plan."

"We will," assented Gerald; "but, Inda, you must not, in your generosity, too hastily reject my proposal of your returning to your mother; means such as yours"—

"Say ours," interrupted Inda; "what is mine is yours."

Oh, how sweetly upon Gerald's ear did these words of gentle womanly love fall, accustomed as he had been for the last some days to have nothing but his own faults thrown in his face; but still he nerved himself for what he had to say.

"Means such as ours are very small to stock a station with, and, even if we are eventually to prosper, there must be much hardship and privation for many years. If not literally the bark hut, it will be some very rough dwelling, and you will have no ladies' society, and either have to do yourself, or go without many things which you have hitherto always had servants to perform—and all this after the prospects I used to hold out to you."

"Those were only visions, and false ones," replied Lucinda; "let the very fact of us having deceived ourselves once prevent us being a second time carried away by fancies, as I think you are inclined to be when you attach so much importance to such things as having to dispense with society, and having few servants."

"You say *we*, my poor Inda, as if you had anything to blame yourself with."

"I have," said she, "something to blame myself with, in all this."

"Why? Heaven knows, you warned me, at the time I first made my wretched intimacy with Pryn."

"Yes, but how did I warn you? With coldness and self-sufficiency."

"You were never self-sufficient, Inda."

"Yes, I was, though unknown to myself, and when I most believed I was acting on principle. I was proud that I did not fall into the faults you did, at the very time when my cold repulsive manner was daily making your home miserable, and driving you to the society of that man."

"Well, well," interrupted Gerald, "it is the only fault you ever committed, and nothing to mine."

"Then we must cease the discussion of faults on either side," said Inda; "for I cannot hear you speak of yours without my own rising in judgment against me. Nor is it a time for either of us to sit down lamenting our past errors; let us only show we remember them by being wiser for the future. A day is at hand that will prove us both, and to meet it we must summon all our energy and courage."

CHAPTER XXIII.

It was later than usual the following morning when Gerald reached his office, but late though it was, the doors were still locked, Mr Pryn having not yet arrived. Recalling his own throbbing headache and feverish excitement of the previous day, Gerald could well imagine what effect a similar cause might have produced on the feeble frame of his partner, and he had no doubt but that he was laid up at home. He went through the business of the day without thinking much of his absence, and when the office was closed in the evening, rode out to Westleigh. Mr Pryn was not there, and Miss Rubina expressed the greatest surprise on hearing that he had not been seen in Sydney. He had left the house early, she said, telling her he intended going in by the omnibus. It passed through Gerald's mind, as he returned home, whether he could have clandestinely quitted that part of the country to escape from his creditors and the disgrace which was impending. There was nothing in the man's character to render such a proceeding unlikely; but his extremely infirm health, which, under any fatigue or hardship, would give way entirely, was against it, and Gerald discarded the idea when he recollected how totally unfit he was for adventurous or independent travelling. Had he been half

an hour later at Westleigh, the mystery—more fatal than he suspected—would have been solved ; as it was, he knew nothing of what had occurred until the following morning, when, with an exclamation of horror, Inda read from the *Herald*, which lay on the breakfast-table, the following paragraph :—

“ We regret to announce to our readers the death, under peculiarly painful circumstances, of an old and respected resident of this town. Yesterday, between the hours of six and seven P.M., a person riding along the banks of the Paramatta river observed something floating in the water which had the appearance of a corpse. Having summoned the assistance of another man, he succeeded in drawing it to shore, when it proved to be the body of George Pryn, Esq., a well-known merchant in Sydney. From the place where deceased was found, it is apprehended that death could not have resulted from accidental drowning, and that the unfortunate gentleman must have contemplated putting an end to his life. Mr Pryn was known to his friends to be of temperate habits, and supposed to be in very prosperous circumstances. The fatal attempt is therefore probably to be attributed to some species of mental derangement.”

The same inference was drawn from the evidence at the inquest, and the verdict returned was, “ Suicide, committed while of unsound mind.”

The shock which this event produced on Gerald is to be truly imagined only by those who can recall having been themselves on the brink of some fearful danger, which they

appreciate in its full extent when beholding the doom of another it has engulfed. He viewed then with a shuddering horror the temptation he had struggled with on the beach but the day before; and those feelings, the sinfulness of which at the time he deemed venial, and had since almost forgotten amid the turmoil of worldly harassment, forced themselves to his recollection, and stood out in their true colours: he saw, also, how by association with this man his own principles had been undermined. With due deference towards one who was now beyond the reach of earthly censure, which prevented him putting the idea into words, he knew that on the very point of the right a person possesses to shorten his own term of existence, his opinions had been corrupted; for, though never openly, Pryn had often hinted his irreligious and sophistical sentiments.

The funeral was fixed to take place the following day; and at an earlier hour than the other gentlemen who were to attend it could be expected, Gerald took his way out to Westleigh.

He stood by the open coffin when there was none other near, and looking down on the cold, still form which lay within, could have said, in almost the words of Richard Baxter, "There, but for the mercy of God, lay I!" And gazing thus on the inanimate clay of the unhappy man, whose life had been so interwoven with his own,—that life of selfishness and worldly pretension, lately of dishonour, and ended by crime,—it was with an emotion greater than he would have been willing that any should witness.

The next arrival in the course of about an hour was Mr

Towers ; he had not been at Westleigh for some time, and was struck, on a near approach, with the altered aspect the place wore. The fences in many parts broken, or mended with stabs of all sizes and shapes, gave a peculiarly untidy, neglected look to the enclosure ; the broken panes of the hot-houses met his eye from the distance, and the unmown lawn and deeply-rutted carriage sweep were in keeping with the state of the grounds as they then were, but such as during the whole term of Mr Towers's residence had never been seen. These things, indeed, struck the eye of the proprietor, but they did not at this time make any impression on his thoughts ; for the mind of the good man was too sincerely concerned about what had occurred to spare any consideration for the disrepair into which his pretty place had fallen.

On the steps of the veranda the two little boys were standing in soiled, untidy pinafores, with faces pale from tears and sleeplessness. Mr Towers took a hand of each, and, thinking of the blasted name and friendless condition of these poor orphans, exclaimed from the bottom of his heart, "Poor children !" He wished to say something more to them ; but when at the tone of kindness the boys burst into tears, a sensation arose in his own throat which made it difficult to speak, and merely pressing the little trembling hands, he repeated, "Poor little dears !" and hastily passed on into the house.

Everything within was still and quiet ; the bustle and confusion which twelve hours before had reigned, had given place to a kind of melancholy calm, which impressed any one entering with the feeling that he was entering the

house of death. Having a wish to take a last look at the poor remains of mortality, he was shown into the room which had been his children's school-room, where it happened Pryn had been in the first instance conveyed, and where the coffin now stood. In the dim light which streamed through the half-closed shutters, Mr Towers saw a figure bending near it, and on hearing footsteps Gerald looked up.

The abrupt manner in which he had left his visitor the previous day, put together with many other pieces of disrespect, Mr Towers conceived to have been an intentional slight, and he now only bowed distantly; but Gerald replied to the formal salutation, "I know no one, Mr Towers, whom I could be so glad to see as yourself; there has been a coldness between us, originating in my fault; but this morning, when the same sad object brings us together, will you not forget the past and shake hands?"

Touched by the tone of emotion, and before the speech was ended, Mr Towers extended his hand, and shook Gerald's with a cordiality which left no doubt as to the friendliness of his feelings.

"This must be a most distressing occurrence, Mr Bright, to you," said he.

"It is, indeed," replied Gerald, in an agitated voice.

"The more so if possible, I should imagine," continued Mr Towers, "from its being a blow of which his friends and relatives can have entertained no apprehension; I never saw any symptoms of insanity about the unfortunate man, and he was not, I believe, addicted to the indulgence which in so many cases in this colony proves fatal."

"Oh no, he was perfectly temperate."

"And not to say in easy circumstances, but possessed of the utmost affluence and prosperity."

Pale as Gerald's face was, it now flushed scarlet, which however, from the darkness of the room, escaped observation. But Mr Towers required no such hint to make him add, "But I confess it is not the thing to ask questions touching his affairs of his partner." Then slightly to turn the conversation, he observed, "A sad event this for his children."

"In more ways than one," replied Gerald. "I am almost sure that Pryn made no provision for them in the event of his own death, and his whole income went to support his style of living."

"I am not surprised to hear it," said Mr Towers.

"But," added Gerald, "they will not be so badly off as some might be in a similar case; their aunt, who can so well afford it, and has no other claims upon her, will look upon them nearly as her own."

"So I should think," replied Mr Towers; "at all events give a home to the little girl, and educate the boys to earn their own livelihoods. Had we not better come this way, Mr Bright," he continued; "I believe we are intended to wait in the drawing-room."

At the door a servant came forward, who conducted them across the hall to the room appointed for the guests. The young woman happened to have been once a domestic of Mr Towers's; she courtesied respectfully to her former master, who recognised her in a few kind words, and inquired for the family.

"Miss Pryn is pretty well, sir," was the reply, "though she don't feel herself equal to come down; and Miss Emily is better."

"Poor child," said Mr Towers, "how does she bear this blow?"

"O sir, she took it dreadful bad, she did not seem to hold up at all."

"Of course, it came upon them with a very sudden shock," said Gerald; "how did they hear of it?"

"They knew nothing of it at all, sir, until he was brought home. Miss Pryn was down t'other end of the garden at the time, and Miss Emmy in the house alone, but for Master George; and to have seen her doing, sir, as quick and quiet all that could be to bring him to life, you would never have guessed how she felt; but when she saw it was all no good, she gave way all at once."

"But she is better now, I hope?" said Gerald.

"Yes, sir, this morning she took her little Bible and said she wanted to stay by herself; and half an hour ago I went up to see her, and she was sleeping with the book open on her lap, and her head leaning against the window frame. I was glad to see it, for I was sure it would do her good, and she looked so quiet and resigned like."

The woman rubbed her eyes with her apron, and the gentlemen passed on.

Other guests began to drop in, and soon the mournful procession was in readiness to move from the house. It was attended by a considerable number of gentlemen's carriages, but very few persons of the lower orders; for of the numbers whom Mr Pryn's lavish expenditure had drawn about him,

there were none who regarded him with a sufficiently disinterested attachment to follow him with sorrow to his grave. Before they quitted the house, a servant delivered to both Mr Towers and Gerald a request from Miss Pryn, that, if convenient, they would call upon her in the course of the following day; they returned a message that they would make a point of doing so, and Gerald begged Mr Towers to name an hour and allow him to call for him in his own carriage.

The whole remainder of that day was spent by Gerald in a painfully unsettled frame of mind; the solemn ceremony, where dust was consigned to dust, and so many aspirings of pride and fondly-cherished hopes which he had shared and encouraged, were buried beneath one small mound of earth in the obscurest corner of the Newtown burial-ground, made on his mind a far deeper impression than such sights on more ordinary occasions convey; to aid which, was the vague sense of his own misfortunes, driven for the present into the background by the horror of this event, and a shrinking from the interview with Miss Rubina, when he would be called upon to make disclosures so painful, and witness the sorrow of her, so nearly related to the deceased. For this, however, there was no alternative, and a little after noon the ensuing day he again found himself with Mr Towers at Westleigh.

There, preparations for departure met their eyes; in the hall were men taking inventories, and in the drawing-room were books and parcels placed ready to be packed. A female servant was disposing of some articles of clothing in a trunk, and as she left her occupation and offered the

gentlemen chairs, they inquired if the family were on the point of removal.

"Miss Pryn intends returning home, sir ; she bade me have all her things in readiness. These are a few of Miss Emily's I am putting together just now."

"Miss Emily then accompanies her aunt ?"

"I haven't heard tell, sir, but I suppose to be sure she will." Saying which, she added that she would inform her mistress ; but as she turned away, the door at the other end of the long drawing-room opened, and Miss Pryn appeared.

Both gentlemen rose, with that involuntary feeling of embarrassment commonly experienced at the first sight of one whose presence is invested with the sanctity of affliction ; they stepped forward, wishing to say something that should express their sympathy, and yet not intrude upon her grief. Her first movements, however, disconcerted theirs ; she did not see them, and stepping quickly up the room, exclaimed to the servant, "I am sure you have mixed some of my things with Emily's ; what are you in such a hurry to put up hers for ?" And with hasty hands she began to pull out all poor Emily's clothes on to the floor, until she came on something which she pounced upon, "Ah ! here's my shawl, I thought I should find it."

The servant whispered a few words, and Miss Pryn started, and looked round. "I had not been informed of your arrival," said she, as she turned towards her visitors, and bowing to Mr Towers, extended her hand to Gerald.

"You must allow us," said Mr Towers, "the privilege of very old acquaintances of your poor brother to assure you how much we feel for your present distress."

The lady turned away her head, and her features expressed certainly very strong emotion ; but recovering herself in a moment, she desired the servant to retire, and motioning them to seats, took one herself.

" You call to-day, I presume, gentlemen, in compliance with my request, and I have given you the trouble of doing so as I am making arrangements to return with all convenient haste to my home at Bathurst, and wish to despatch as soon as possible the various matters of business which, in consequence of the suddenness of this event, devolve on me to settle."

" I shall be happy," said Mr Towers, " if it is in my power to serve you in any way, and I beg that you will take entirely your own time in leaving this, as I should be sincerely sorry you inconvenienced yourself by moving to another home at all sooner than suits your plans."

" You are very polite, sir, very good, Mr Towers ; but my plans, so far as concern myself, are formed, and for the children it is not in my power to lay any ; you are, perhaps, not aware that my brother died without having made any provision for them, or appointed any legal guardian."

" In so distressing a case," observed Mr Towers, " we must be thankful that they have at least the comfort of a near relation with them, on whose kindness they have a claim."

Miss Pryn's face suddenly changed. " Indeed," she answered, in a very decided tone, " I do not feel that those children have any claim upon me ; I have lost a great deal by my brother's speculations, and cannot afford to support them."

"I do not mean in a pecuniary point of view only," observed Mr Towers.

"But it is in a pecuniary point of view I do mean," replied Miss Pryn; "and if George had taken my advice, it never would have come to this. I told him he ought to secure something for them while he had it in his power, and times without number I have said, 'You are ruining your children,' when I saw him bringing them up with such expensive habits, and spending his income as fast as it came in, or rather forestalling it; no one knows better than you, Mr Bright, the state in which he left his affairs."

The intelligent glance she threw at Gerald almost took away his self-possession; he knew not what answer to make, and raised his handkerchief to his face to conceal his emotion. A pause of some moments ensued, which, after waiting in vain for Gerald to speak, Mr Towers broke.

"The boys will soon be able to do something for themselves, and my little friend Emily would be a comfort and a pleasure to any one."

Miss Rubina did not directly reply, for a step was heard in the hall, and she called out, "Edward, what are you doing there? not dirtying your new clothes, I hope?"

The child answered by showing himself at the door, in a new suit of deep mourning. Miss Pryn looked at him from head to foot; whether it was her criticism, or the thoughts awakened by the sight of Mr Towers and Gerald, who, but the day before, had stood with him by the new-made grave of his father, the boy's eyes began to fill fast with tears, which he wiped away on the rough sleeve of his jacket.

"Now, don't," said Miss Pryn, pulling his arm down imperiously, "rumple that weeper ; mind you keep quiet, so as not to spoil that dress ; go and put on a pinafore, and make George do the same."

In spite of the aunt's remonstrance, the cuff was again applied to wet eyes, and the gentlemen exchanged a glance which expressed what each thought of Miss Pryn. She, however, did not feel what it implied, and closing the door behind the child she resumed her seat and again addressed Gerald.

"To return to what we were saying with regard to those children, Mr Bright, it is as well to know the worst at once ; I suppose there will be little or nothing coming to them ?"

Before Gerald could reply Mr Towers rose. "You will prefer, no doubt, that I retire for a short time ; if you, madam, have anything further to say to me I shall be at your service when more important matters are discussed." So saying he left the room.

The conversation that ensued between Gerald and Miss Pryn was painful and unsatisfactory. She was sufficiently informed of the state of her brother's mercantile affairs to be far from taken by surprise on learning that the debts and liabilities he had incurred very greatly exceeded his assets ; but she was restrained by neither delicacy nor affection from freely condemning the course he had pursued, and by her harsh and pointed censure (including equally himself) stung Gerald to the quick. She congratulated herself on the clearness of judgment which had prevented her involving her own affairs materially with those of the

ruined firm, though irritated by the losses she did sustain, repeated her former declaration, that she could do nothing for her niece or nephews, who probably would have to go upon the parish. This was a point which no one, of course, had a right to urge with her ; and oppressed with a consciousness of his own utter incapacity to offer any assistance, Gerald felt that he was the last man in the world who could do so with a good grace.

While driving home with Mr Towers, he repeated the substance of that portion of the conversation.

"I confess, Mr Bright," said Mr Towers, "that you have far more right than I to take an active interest in this family ; yet I cannot refrain from saying, that I shall be most happy to join, as far as is in my power, in any little plans for the children's benefit."

"You are very good, sir," stammered Gerald ; "but I am afraid that, look at them which way we may, their prospects are very dark indeed ; the children are so young, they are not capable of doing anything for themselves ; the boys are fit for nothing but to run errands or assist in a shop."

"Of course, when people have nothing," observed Mr Towers, gravely, "they must put pride in their pocket ; but it is a sad necessity which obliges boys at so early an age to earn their own bread by means that irrevocably sinks them out of the rank in which they were born, and by stopping short education, precludes through life all hope of advancement."

"It is quite clear," said Gerald, "that they must not depend on their aunt ; and the little girl, I don't know what will become of her."

"I think it likely," replied Mr Towers, after some reflection, "that if the boys were off her hands, Miss Pryn might so far relent as to take charge of Emily. Don't you think, Mr Bright, that between us, you and I could contrive something for them for the next few years?"

This suggestion, under other circumstances, would have been received by Gerald with sincere pleasure, or he might have been the first to originate it; but now it overwhelmed him with pain and confusion, and he experienced a perfect agony of embarrassment how to answer Mr Towers with the negative which was indispensable. He commenced and abandoned more than one sentence, until Mr Towers looked at him with an expression of surprised inquiry; at last, with an effort at self-command, and coming to the conclusion that frankness was the best policy on a matter which a few days must make known to every one, he once more resumed—

"This is not a time to speak of my own affairs, but I must do so in order to explain why it is not in my power to join, as otherwise would have given me so much satisfaction, in your benevolent scheme." He paused for one moment to steady his voice, then hurriedly continued, "You believe it was only extravagance and want of forethought in his private expenditure that has brought my partner to this pass; but the exigence is common to us both; our speculations lately have turned out most unfortunately. I, as well as he, had everything at stake; in a few days it must be known that our firm is insolvent."

"Is it possible! I am very sorry," exclaimed Mr

Towers, "and very much surprised; both surprised and concerned,—I am truly concerned."

"It is unnecessary for me to enter into explanations," resumed Gerald, "for, as I say, in a very short time all must be public; and then I fear, Mr Towers, I shall lose whatever favourable opinion you may have been good enough to form of me."

These last words were spoken in a very low voice and with averted face.

"I trust not," replied Mr Towers, "for I believe whatever errors you may have fallen into have been those of judgment, and not of intention; I know that youth is rash, and when the counsel of elder friends tends to pervert and excite, in place of to sober, is often hurried on to actions of which it sees neither the bearings nor the end."

"Oh! stop," interrupted Gerald; "I cannot hear blame, even implied, one who, for whatever wrong he committed, has paid the full penalty."

"I have done," replied Mr Towers; "it is as little my intention, as I am certain it is yours, to cast blame on the memory of the departed; yet, when I consider what a plausible fellow Pryn was,—what a talent he had for making the worse appear the better cause, I cannot help thinking that you may have been somewhat misled."

"Things might indeed have been very different," sighed Gerald, "had I had the advantage of such a friend as you."

"As far as my friendship could be of any use to you," replied Mr Towers, "you might have had it long ago; for though we have never until now spoken together with any

frankness, I have felt an interest in you ever since your honourable conduct towards my son-in-law, Charles Lancefield."

"That was only a piece of common honesty," said Gerald; "justice required it."

"It did, no doubt," answered Mr Towers; "but it is not every one who can admit the justice of a cause which makes against his own interest."

"But at any rate," said Gerald, "the merit, if there is any, is not mine; I—I fear I had never thought of the necessity of making restitution until it was urged upon me by my wife."

"That is what I should have expected of your excellent wife," cried Mr Towers; "still, I cannot admit that none of the merit was yours; and I only wish that the acquaintance so auspiciously commenced had ripened into friendship. Few things," he added, "are of so much importance as the choice of friends in early life."

Mr Towers's tone was so friendly, that Gerald felt tempted to treat him yet more openly, and enter upon the subject of the impending trial, asking what he thought of the position in which he stood. In truth, Gerald was very nervous as to the result of the investigation, and the conversations he had held with his brother-in-law, (the only person except Lucinda with whom he had hitherto discussed the affair,) had not contributed to inspire him with confidence. It was therefore rather as a question than an assertion of his own opinion that he remarked, "They can't punish one person for the fault of another. I swear to you that I had nothing to do with it; I did not even know what was

going on. Surely I shall have no difficulty in proving this?"

Mr Towers looked very serious ; though a man of a most hopeful disposition, he was also a man of the world, and a man of business ; and he saw at once that Gerald was placed in a very grave predicament. "We must trust," said he, "that truth will prevail ; but collect all the proofs you can, Bright, and get a good lawyer to undertake your defence ;" which advice, kindly as it was given, did not help to cheer Gerald, showing plainly Mr Towers's views of the difficulties that lay before him ; and as for having his cause well defended, little could he afford to retain a counsel.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HENRY LANCEFIELD, with the remainder of the crew of the *Southern Cross*, was landed in Sydney, having been picked up by a passing vessel bound for this port. And a miserable-looking set they were; but none so much so as Henry himself, who, of an age when the full strength is not attained, and naturally of a somewhat delicate constitution—as no one could look at his tall slender figure and fair complexion and doubt—had been fatally injured by the hardships of the last some weeks: he was emaciated, racked with cough, and unable to stand without support. The first person who met him was a police officer with a warrant for his apprehension, on the charge of wilfully losing his vessel; he was, however, so utterly unfit to go through any public examination, that the trial was of necessity postponed, and soon it became evident that he would live to appear before no earthly judge; that his days, if not his hours, were numbered. From time to time, as he was able to speak, his deposition was taken down, and was in accordance with what has been related; he attempted no equivocation, his interest in giving even a false colouring was past, and he repeated, as well as he was able, the substance of conversations between himself and Pryn, stating that by themselves alone the plan had been arranged.

This was so far good for Gerald, though it would not do to attach too much weight to it, as there was no direct evidence to prove that he might not have been in his partner's counsels.

To his brother, also, Henry made a clean breast, and bitterly did he moralise on his own lamentable position, not, however, in the best strain of penitence, for his reflections chiefly took the shape of railings against Pryn, who had placed temptation in his way, and cursings of Fate, who had all his days, he declared, dogged his steps; at other times his own sins would stand out prominently before him, and render him terrified in the prospect of death. His brother and sister-in-law spent the greater part of their time with him; and while the upright mind of Mr Lancefield could not but regard with mixed horror and astonishment the part which his brother had acted, these feelings in a great measure gave way before that of compassion for the miserable condition of the boy whom he loved so well, whom he viewed with a father's interest as well as a brother's affection.

This blow to Charles, which exceeded any grief he had yet undergone, was embittered by the reflection that he had directed the education of his brother, and he sought, while looking back upon his own management, to detect errors which might account for so grievous a result. His self-accusations were unfounded, as never had greater care been thrown away on any boy; but to a sensitive mind they were perhaps inevitable in the circumstances. Lately things had gone too smoothly with Charles, not a cloud had been in his sky, and such a condition is not usually

long allowed to man below ; now this heavy sorrow had come, and it seemed as if to remind him that human life is ever a mingled web—the brighter the warp, the darker the woof.

Everything that kindness could do to alleviate Henry's sufferings of mind and body was done by Charles and Lydia, who vied with each other in this work. The latter, forgetting the many unpleasant passages which had been between her and her brother-in-law, devoted herself to attendance upon him ; had she been his mother, or really his sister, she could not have done more ; performing all the offices of a nurse, and depriving herself of sleep and of refreshment in order to be with him. Henry suffered very much, he was shattered with cough and had bruises in his chest which pained him very severely ; his was no patient endurance, and sometimes, when tossing restlessly on his couch, unable to find ease in any posture, he would exclaim, "I wish I could die at once and be done with it;" but then he would add, "No, I can't die, I should only be going from misery in this world to greater misery in the next." All the religious consolations of his brother and sister, all their endeavours to lead him to a right way of thinking, were utterly unavailing.

One morning Charles, going early into his brother's room, found him just awakened, and more discomposed than usual, the expression of his face less hardened, but sadder, and traces of tears were on his cheeks. "I have been dreaming of mamma," said he, in a broken voice. "I thought she came to me in the night. Oh, how little did she think what I was to come to!"

As he lay there, his face, from which sickness and confinement had removed all effects of sun-burning, fair and white as nature had made it, his soft brown hair, grown long during his illness, streaming over the pillow, he looked so like what Charles remembered him when, years ago, he was his mother's pet, the youngest of her family—perhaps rather spoiled on that account—that Mr Lancefield's utmost feelings of tenderness were called out, and for the moment almost unmanned him. He stooped to kiss his brother's forehead.

Henry, with a burst of tears, threw his arm round his neck. "O Charles! I have brought myself to this; if I had only taken your advice!"

Charles soothed him as gently as any woman could have done.

"How ungratefully I have always behaved to you," sobbed Henry, "and you were such a brother to me; but it was not that I did not love you, for I did, even at the time when I behaved worst; and the night before I sailed, just after I had held my last fatal conversation with Pryn, I went to your house, and stood—I can't tell how long—looking at the light in the room where you sat. I do believe that if you had happened to open the window, I would have gone in and told you everything."

If! Oh, how many such ifs there are in life! On how many evenings—perhaps most evenings—Charles, about the hour referred to, stepped into the veranda, and stood looking at the stars overhead, or the lights scattered through the town below; but on that evening, when life or death, honour or dishonour, the whole destiny of a

brother depended on the action, the fates had decreed it was not to be done. Perhaps he was skimming through some amusing book ; perhaps discussing with Lydia some unimportant question, and had little suspicion that a figure was standing in the darkness without, looking yearningly up at the window while his last chance was passing from him.

Charles could only sigh, as something like this passed through his own mind, "That which is done cannot be undone," said he ; "but I think, Henry, that if you get well, you and I will be friends in a very different way from what we have hitherto been."

"I shall not get well," returned Henry, passionately ; "I am dying, and I am not fit to die."

"Who *is* fit to die," said Mr Lancefield, seriously, "were it not for the Atonement made for us ? But we have to do with a merciful God and a loving Saviour. Lydia," he added, "can tell you about these things better than I can."

"Lydia," repeated Henry ; "how badly I behaved to her ! You don't half know how I used to provoke and tease her."

"Never mind that now," said Charles ; "she thinks nothing of it."

"I see she does not," replied Henry ; "she is far kinder than I deserve."

"Lydia is a Christian, Henry," observed his brother ; "that makes her so kind and good ; and if you would try to see things in the light in which she places them before you, you would be happier than you are."

To this Henry replied impatiently, "I can't."

As Henry's strength visibly declined, Lydia concentrated all her endeavours to lead him to seek his peace with God. It was to her so awful, that he who had a load of more than usual sin upon his conscience should be daily more nearly approaching death without making one attempt to reconcile his offended Maker, or having one hold on the promises of Scripture. She longed to lead him to say of the guilt, which in one sense he confessed freely enough, "Against Thee have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight." Then she would have pointed him to the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world, and assured him of the immutability of that promise, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out."

Lydia could speak upon, as well as feel, religion, and this was not the first sick-bed by which she had ministered; but such an experience as she was now called upon to go through she had never known before.

Henry was not intentionally sceptical, nor did he in the least scoffingly—latterly, at all events—reject what she said; but his heart seemed closed against the truths she placed before him.

One evening she had been with him during many hours, and had spent the greater part of the previous night by his bedside. She saw that what strength he had was perceptibly failing, and could not have wondered if any moment the summons had come. Gathering, as it were, all her energies into one last attempt, she had been more than ever earnest in pleading with him. She had repeated to him portions of the Bible; she had read passages from

commentaries which seemed to her striking; she had poured out her own soul in prayer, and all in vain, Henry did not dispute his own unfitness to meet death and judgment, nor, when she spoke of the mercy of God, did he profess to disbelieve that either; but a link was wanting in his mind between the two—he could not believe that the mercy of God was for him. Lydia was deeply depressed; she felt that nothing further was in her power; they were both in the hand of One stronger than they, who can give or withhold, as He pleases, increase to the seed sown.

Evening was closing in, and the gloom of twilight enshrouded the chamber; Henry lay silent and feeble, and beside the bed sat his sister-in-law, looking nearly as pale and exhausted as himself. She had shed many tears that day, and now, unnerved by want of sleep and of refreshment, she bowed her face on her knees and wept unrestrainedly.

Henry had more than once during the day appeared touched with the sight of her sympathy, and he now observed with a slight accent of surprise, “How much you feel for me, Lydia, and I behaved so badly to you!”

“I retain no recollection of that,” said she.

“I see you do not, but it is very kind and forgiving of you.”

“If you think so,” said Lydia, raising her head; “let it be to you a faint emblem of the forgiveness and the mercy of God; if a faulty human being can be kind and forgiving, how much more may we trust that He whose name is love will care for the souls which He has made!” She had not much hope that the remark would have any good effect, she spoke only the words which rose from her heart.

Henry made no reply, and at that moment Charles entered, to insist on his wife's retiring to take some rest. He accompanied her from the room, and they stood together a moment in the passage.

"God will bless you for all you are doing for my poor brother," said he.

"I wish it were of more avail," answered Lydia, sadly. "O Charles! what a lesson this is on the difficulties of death-bed repentance; let no one think to postpone preparation till the eleventh hour."

She retired to her room in painful despondency.

Early the following day she again sought Henry's chamber, expecting to find him in much the same mood as he had been in all through his illness. What was her surprise, when, on her entrance, he held out his hand to her; and with a face brightened by something more than hope, said, "Lydia, I have been watching for you to come, I long to tell you what those last words of yours have done for me. I see things as I never did before—I feel that a human being, even perfect as you are, cannot be more loving and merciful than her Maker, and I believe that God has such mercy as even to have forgiven me."

Lydia's tears again rushed to her eyes, but they were from a very different source from those which she had lately shed.

Yes, so it was; those few simple words had done for Henry what laboured argument had failed to effect; they had supplied, as it were, the link that was wanting in his mind; from that hour his conviction was firm, he had not so much as a moment of darkness. Through the greater

part of that day Henry lay contentedly drinking in the verses of Scripture and hymns which his sister-in-law read to him ; her prayers were, indeed, turned into praises, and often his own failing voice would join with hers in ascribing adoration and thansgiving to Him who had loved and redeemed him.

Both his brother and sister were with him when he died ; and though they knew that had he lived, it would have been to stand a trial in which a criminal charge could hardly fail of being substantiated against him, that a penal sentence would in all probability have been awarded him, that as it was a brand of deep disgrace must ever rest upon his name, still they felt assured, as they heard him draw his last sigh, that a forgiven and accepted spirit had returned to the bosom of its God.

Some hours afterwards, Mr and Mrs Lancefield stood together by the bedside, looking on the still face, which, though it bore traces of earthly suffering more than is usual at twenty-one years, was nevertheless placid and at rest.

"He knows the great secret which we shall all know some day," said Lydia, solemnly.

"He is safe now, poor boy," added Mr Lancefield, whose face was half hidden in his handkerchief ; "temptation can never reach him more."

But even amid the fervent thankfulness which filled their hearts they felt how different things might have been ; he might have lived, and correcting, as experience brought wisdom, the faults of his boyhood, have enjoyed a happy and useful career, instead of being thus cut off in the flower

of his youth, had not *one* come with temptation across his path and smoothed for him the road to ruin.

“It is difficult to think with charity”—— Mr Lancefield began, and paused.

His wife understood of whom he was thinking. “Yes,” she replied; “and we can only do so by remembering the command, to forgive as we hope to be forgiven.”

CHAPTER XXV.

"WHAT is the penalty for wilfully losing a vessel?" Lucinda asked, in a hesitating tone, after a long and gloomy silence between herself and Gerald.

"Something very serious indeed," was his brief reply.

Another pause.

"I wish," observed Gerald, abruptly; "that I could afford to retain Lancefield as my counsel."

"I suppose," said Inda, "that when a lawyer gets into such repute as Mr Lancefield, he expects his fees to be large in proportion."

Gerald made no direct reply, but resumed his desponding attitude, leaning his head on his hands.

"How strangely," he observed, "our faults come back upon our own heads! I used to be hard upon my father, and is there now so much difference between us?"

The next moment a servant entered with a note upon a salver. Gerald glanced at the handwriting, and, with a half expression of surprise, tore open the envelope. The contents were as follows:—

"MY DEAR BRIGHT,—I don't know whether my services can be of any use to you on the coming trial, but unless you think that some one else will do more justice to your cause, my legal knowledge, such as it is, and my best en-

deavours, are yours to command. My own conviction of the rectitude of your case is so strong, that I feel as if it would inspire me with eloquence on the occasion. Of course, you understand that this offer is entirely as from friend to friend; but if you accept it, please send me a line at once. —Believe me, very truly yours,

“CHARLES LANCEFIELD.”

Gerald's face brightened as he read. “What a glorious fellow!” was his first remark. “It really is very handsome of him to come forward in this way.”

This note did him good in more ways than one. Not only he felt that he had the best counsel, perhaps, in the place, but the kindness cheered him; he was pleased to know that he retained some portion of the good opinion of at least one person.

“I should like to thank Lancefield in person for this,” said he, and he pulled out his watch. It was nearly ten o'clock, too late to disturb him; so he wrote a note, which he despatched at once, and early the following morning called on Mr Lancefield.

Charles was alone, in a room which now looked very like a lawyer's chamber, and Gerald, in the midst of his own selfish anxieties, was recalled to a recollection of the barrister's personal interest in the case to be investigated by the expression of deep sadness which rested on his face—an expression which betrayed how much sorrow may be in the heart, even when the wheels of business will not stop to allow the indulgence of grief. On the table lay a brief, on which Gerald's eye fell on entering; and Mr Lancefield

pointed to it with a smile, "You see we are not a bit too soon; they sent me that with a retaining fee this morning."

"What request you are in!" exclaimed Gerald. "I hope you have few such unprofitable clients as I am; but, if it is not an impertinent question, may I ask what amount of fee they sent you?"

"Oh, never mind; it is of no consequence," said the other, slightly, and turned the conversation.

"But I should like to know," urged Gerald, "if you do not mind."

The other named, though reluctantly, a sum of large amount.

Gerald looked distressed. "Really," said he, "I do not like to take your services for nothing."

"My dear fellow, you need have no scruple whatever; remember, this is not the first time you and I have had a money transaction together."

Gerald understood, and he felt the delicacy and generosity of the allusion, which relieved him as nothing else could have done.

"I expect," pursued Charles, "to make very good use of that portion of your antecedents. I shall urge—with, I hope, great effect—how unlikely it is that a young man, whose feelings were too honourable to allow him to retain possession of a fortune, to which he had a doubtful title, even though the law had awarded it to him, would lend himself to such a transaction."

"Do you think," suggested Gerald, doubtfully, "that it will be prudent to bring forward that circumstance? It

may bring other things to their recollection, and they will say I come of a bad stock."

"Unfortunately," replied Charles, gravely, "other things are too well known to be possibly kept in the background; they are quite sure to be brought forward; all that we can hope to do is to turn their own weapons against themselves."

"Well, I am sure," said Gerald, as he wrung Charles Lancefield's hand at parting, "that you will get me off if any one can; I leave my case in your hands with the most perfect confidence, Lancefield." He turned to leave the room, but paused yet a moment; his warm, though impulsive feelings were touched to the quick by the traces of grief, which, unobtrusive, yet unmistakable, had changed Charles Lancefield's face since last they met, and he involuntarily exclaimed, "What an effort it must cost you, Lancefield, to attend to these things!"

Mr Lancefield without reply averted his face; there are sorrows too sacred to bear even the touch of sympathy.

The sight of that brief, and his knowledge of the large retaining fee that accompanied it, did not raise Gerald's spirits, proving, as they did, the desire of his opponents to secure, at any cost, the best advocate for their cause. That they were very inveterate against him, Gerald already knew, and a rumour had reached him that some of the pursuers, irritated at two of their victims—viz., Henry and Pryn—having as they somewhat profanely expressed it, given them the slip, had declared themselves resolved, if possible, to punish Bright.

The dreaded day arrived. Gerald, pale as death, lin-

gered one last moment with Inda ere he followed Mr Towers, who had stood heavy bail for him, to the cab in which that gentleman was to accompany him to the court-house.

Mr Towers, a true, stanch friend in an hour of adversity, exhorted him to courage by a cheerful tone and bearing, though more precious than even Mr Towers's kindness was the recollection he bore with him in his heart of Inda's last whispered words, "If all the world should blame you, you will have your wife to love you still." But neither he nor she dared to dwell on what must follow should the case go against them.

We abstain from giving the slightest detail of the trial. Suffice it to say, that it was a very nice and difficult point to get Gerald off, and everything depended on his counsel. But Charles Lancefield, in an admirable and eloquent speech, carried the judge and jury along with him in his belief of his client's innocence, and Gerald was acquitted.

What an anxious interval of suspense did Lucinda spend at home! Poor Inda's married life led her through stormy passages! Mrs Lancefield offered to stay with her, if her presence would be a comfort; but there are moments which cannot be shared with any friend—save One, and that no earthly one,—and Inda told Lydia, without fear of being misunderstood, that she must be alone; so she sat with her Bible in her hand, trying, by intercourse with its sacred pages, to keep her mind in something of tranquillity, but her thoughts, in spite of her efforts, kept wandering to the scene enacting in the crowded court-house.

At last the wheels of a fast-driving cab were heard under the windows, and stopped at the door. Inda's heart beat almost to bursting; she did not dare look out to see whether it contained her husband or Mr Towers alone; the next moment Gerald broke in upon her, and she knew at once by his radiant face the happy issue of the trial.

"We owe it all to Lancefield," said he, after having given her a rapid sketch of the proceedings; "he has well repaid our having given up to him that fortune."

Inda dashed some happy tears from her eyes, and opening again her Bible, showed Gerald this verse, "Cast thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it after many days."

CHAPTER XXVI.

MR TOWERS'S offers to serve the orphan family of Pryn did not end in words; he exerted himself among his friends to raise a small subscription for their benefit, and was so far successful, that, by carefully husbanding the means at his disposal, he hoped to be able to complete well the boys' education; for any expenses of their maintenance, which this would not cover, he made himself responsible, and gave them moreover the inestimable advantage of his guardianship and supervision.

The example of this good man was not altogether thrown away; for Miss Rubina, perhaps ashamed that strangers should undertake the burden of her brother's orphan family, while she did nothing, so far relented as to volunteer to take charge of Emily. Her niece had always been her favourite, and she really was as fond of her as it was in her nature to be of any one. She respected her, too, for the steadiness and simplicity with which she had resisted all allurements to vanity, when so many temptations were put in her way; and though her virtues were for the most part of a quiet, retiring character, very much out of her own line, there were certain qualities which Miss Pryn could appreciate wherever they were found. All this, however, might not have weighed the balance in her

niece's favour, had she not reflected that Emily would be little trouble to her in the meantime, and might in the course of a few years be made very useful. The resolution to take her home was no sooner adopted, than a very short time elapsed before she was ready to quit Sydney. And now, any person who was not prejudiced by Miss Pryn's heartless behaviour, might have admired the capacity with which she looked into and arranged the varied and tangled affairs which, as sole executrix of her late brother, were thrown upon her hands. She entered with Gerald into a full investigation of how matters stood, compromised claims, pacified creditors, and in less time than many a woman would have taken to understand how she stood affected by her brother's death, was ready to start with her young charge for Bathurst.

The parting between Emily and her brothers renewed the grief of each, and as they stood for the last time together on the veranda steps at Westleigh, they felt, poor children, as few at their age happily can feel, what it is to be thrown orphans and penniless on the charity of this hard world. Again and again they embraced, until at last the little girl was almost forced into the carriage which was to convey her to a home so distant from all she had ever known and loved.

It may be supposed that, left to the tender mercies of Miss Rubina, it would be very long before the poor child's natural grief for all she had lost could be assuaged; but such was not altogether the case. In adopting Emily, Miss Pryn honestly intended to be kind to her; unlike her poor brother, who often found an actual pleasure in tormenting

others, she liked to see everybody happy ; to live and let live, was her maxim—not, indeed, from any very generous motive, but because it is impossible to witness sorrow and low spirits without the even current of our own happiness being more or less disturbed ; and it was only when the claims of others clashed with her private interests that she proved selfish and harsh-tempered. Emily, indeed, did not meet with much sympathy from her aunt, nor with any of those little gentle attentions which win a mourner from her grief ; but change of scene does a great deal, and during the first week or so, while Miss Pryn was busy settling and forming her household, she had leisure to school her mind into a fitting frame. There was appropriated to her use a convenient, quiet room, where she could read, and pray, and think, and she could walk in the pretty environs of her aunt's dwelling in the calm early morning and the sweet fall of evening, when birds were pouring forth their varied notes, and wild flowers opening to the balmy air, and all creation around seemed speaking with a thousand voices of a universal goodness and love, which promised to those desolate as she was, "*I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.*"

At the end of an interval, sufficient for the due indulgence of her feelings, without allowing time for her mind to sink into the morbid state which too long dwelling upon private troubles is apt to engender, Miss Pryn's arrangements were completed, and they fell into the routine of life they were to pursue. Emily was called upon to be her aunt's companion, to accompany her in walks and rides, and to visit with her in what little society there was. Nor were

her days allowed to pass in idleness: indoors, she had occupations of books, and needlework, and accounts; and out of doors there was gardening to be superintended, fields to be inspected, animals to be visited. In all this Emily became insensibly interested, and, novice though she was, she could not but be struck by the perfect neatness and superior arrangements on the farm, by which every portion of Miss Pryn's property was turned to the best possible account, and she began eagerly to enter into the details of a business which enabled her relative to live in such comfort and respectability. Thus many causes combined, aided by the naturally buoyant heart of fifteen, began to restore her cheerfulness and even spirits; once again she crossed the lawn with a light elastic step; before the summer was over her cheeks regained a bloom which rivalled that of the roses she daily tended, her eyes sparkled with animation and the vaguely-defined hopes which gild the future to the mind of early youth. In a word, her new home seemed to promise to the orphan girl more real happiness than in her short though eventful life had ever fallen to her lot; far more than had been compatible with the poverty and struggles of her childhood, and more than she had enjoyed amidst the pride and luxury of her father's short-lived prosperity.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AMID the cares and preparations which occupied the last few weeks of her residence in Sydney, Lucinda made a point of devoting a portion of every day to the family of her brother-in-law ; taking a surveillance of the servants, and of the children, whom she endeavoured to prevent falling into irregular and independent habits, during what she trusted was the temporary absence of their mother ; and when her final farewell was taken, the last proof of confidence she left with her friend Lydia, was a request that she would occasionally bestow a little attention on these virtually motherless children.

Lydia promised to do what she could to supply Lucinda's place, even at the risk of being thought officious by Mr Milner ; but there were difficulties in the way of her being of much use ; the children were shyer than formerly, and the servants looked upon her visits with a very jealous eye. Then she asked leave for the children to come to her house ; but Mr Milner did not allow them to accept invitations, and would make no exceptions to his rule ; she therefore saw but little of them, beyond holding occasionally a few minutes' conversation with Freddy, who might often be found playing with chance companions on the beach at the foot of the garden ; for if she entered the cottage and

tried to make friends with the little girl, Edith would hang her head and return scarcely audible answers to the good-natured questions and funny stories, which from most children won Lydia a rather troublesome degree of favour. But when disheartened by these failures, and tempted to feel provoked by the impracticability of those whom she wished to benefit, one glance round the parlour, and she could only mourn for the change which she saw. There was something painful as well as uninviting in the union of formality and untidiness which the room presented; formality, from the absence of any signs of a woman's occupations and belongings, and untidiness likewise owing to the want of a female presence to keep things in nice order, and efface the traces of children's play and carelessness. If anything further was needed to soften Mrs Lancefield's heart towards this desolated home, the sight of little Edith's black sash was sufficient, and it was often with hardly suppressed tears that she quitted the house.

The badge of mourning! Yes, it was as poor Margaret had herself in her heart foretold; the baby from the hour of her departure visibly pined; it was of an age and delicate constitution which demanded a care none but a mother's affection would bestow; and when she in whose breast nature had implanted a love for its very feebleness was, in outrage of nature's laws, separated from it, there was no one to take her place; its father's attentions were limited to a hasty visit to the nursery twice a day, and after a few weeks of wasting and suffering the poor child died. Mr Milner was not a man to lose one of his children without strong feeling, and the little Gretta was called after his Margaret, and was

the last that she had given him ; it seemed another link broken of the chain which united him to her, a further severance of those holy bonds which he had first wrenched asunder. But when his self-accusing voice awoke it was resolutely stifled, for Mr Milner nourished much resentment against Margaret; and while he scorned to offer any conciliation, the blame he attached to her enabled him to justify his own conduct. In what degree he felt the break up of his happy domestic circle was difficult to pronounce, as his feelings found no expression, his business was attended to as usual, but when over for the day he would pace for hours the trellised walk before the cottage, or sit by his solitary fire wrapped in a gloom and abstraction that was no token of a mind at rest. Sometimes one of the children would climb his knee and ask "when mamma was coming back," but though more than once obliged to set the child hastily down and turn away, no other sign of softened feeling escaped him. Margaret's name became by degrees very much a forbidden word in the house; the children, impressed by their father's grave, stern manner, acquired an instinct that they were not to ask questions, and thus were taken (perhaps involuntarily) the very means to teach them to forget that they had a mother.

Within a very few months a considerable change was perceptible in these children, who were of an age when almost every day leaves its own stamp for either good or evil. Freddy was growing fast, but he did not improve in proportion as he got older and taller; his father carried on his education, but Mr Milner found the practical task of tuition by no means so delightful as its theory is sometimes

represented. Freddy was neither a very docile pupil, nor did he discover as much intelligence as his father had believed him to possess. The truth is that something more is wanted than the bare routine of lessons to open a young mind, and the best selected studies will serve but to bewilder the brain, unless the home supplies also an atmosphere of intelligence, where the dawns of inquiry meet with comprehension and encouragement. When Freddy had finished his appointed tasks, his only associates were ignorant servants, or the equally profitless playfellows whom idleness and chance threw in his way ; at the same time, he showed more than sufficient quickness in picking up slang expressions, and began to exhibit much of that precocious forwardness of manner which is so unbecoming a characteristic of many young colonists. His temper, violent and overbearing, was a source of perpetual contention with the servants, who opposed him without teaching him the necessity of controlling himself ; and against his petty tyranny Edith had no resource save in fretful complaints and avoidance of his company.

And well it might be so, for in those little disputes which will occur even between children who love each other, there was no one now to interfere with conciliating tact, no one to teach Freddy that might is not right, and that true superiority lies in conquering, not pursuing a headstrong will ; no one to encourage Edith to be bold in speaking the truth in the confidence that she would meet with only kindness and impartiality ; no one to teach them to restrain their tempers, not so much by verbal lessons as by her example who never lost her own. Mr Milner saw that

something was wrong, but he did not see the remedy, and he was so little at home that he had no idea in how many ways Margaret's superintendence was missed. One day, happening to return from his office at an unusual hour, a rather startling view of the state of his household was obtruded on his vision.

In the entrance passage, at the very door of the sitting-room, lay the prostrate form of the cook, almost insensible from intoxication; the two other female domestics, after a considerable interval, made their appearance from contrary directions, where each had been pursuing her plan of amusement for the afternoon; in the nursery little Edith was found alone, in a very dirty white frock, with her hair about her ears, fretting over some piece of injustice on the part of her brother, who, a truant from his books, was discovered in the back yard at forbidden play with the stable boy. Mr Milner's indignation was exhibited by a few very decisive acts; he gave a comprehensive warning to the household, though question, whether a change of servants would mend matters; and fetching Freddy indoors, chastised him on the spot. At the very moment, however, his heart misgave him as to the justice of the infliction, and turning his back upon the cottage he mounted his horse and rode some miles out of Sydney.

Presently he was overtaken by Charles Lancefield, and in the course of conversation he mentioned his wish that he could meet with some person, superior to a common servant, to whom he could with confidence intrust his children, and the control of his establishment.

"Why not get a good governess?" Charles suggested;

but added, a moment afterwards, that his wife's opinion would be far better than his own on such a subject. Mr Milner rather caught at the idea, and the two gentlemen proceeded together to Mr Lancefield's house.

And what was Margaret about all this time? Attending her father like his good angel. On arriving at Hobart Town they knew not one person who could afford them countenance in any way; the death of Mr Francis implied a loss beyond even that of his personal influence. Margaret being thus in a strange place, without clue where to turn either for employment for her father or a respectable asylum for him, was very much at his mercy, and he was thrown entirely on his own resources. His thoughts reverted to the means by which he had formerly made a livelihood, and, relieved from the surveillance of his son, who had constrained him to assume somewhat the demeanour of a gentleman, he threw off at once all artificial appearances, resuming the habits, language, and dress of a working man, which, during the years of his penal servitude, had become habitual to him as second nature. His inclination led him to seek employment in the interior, and thither his daughter accompanied him, her wish being, not to put obstacles in the way of his accepting any respectable employment, however humble, for which he felt himself suited, but to watch over him wherever he might be.

Bright hired himself out as a shepherd, but his restless love of change did not allow him to remain long on any spot, and he was constantly on the move; now turning his hand to sheep-washing, now taking a job as shearer, and

anon shepherding for a few months. Wherever he went Margaret went with him, where he rested she rested, where he lodged she lodged. This wild and wandering life made her acquainted with strange scenes and companions; she was hut-keeper for her father, cooking his beef, damper, and tea; she did not despise, when such came in her way, a job of needlework herself, thankful in fact to be occupied and to add a few shillings to their little store; she made no attempt to maintain any appearance superior to her present condition, she rather strove to avoid drawing attention to herself; and dreaded being taken for anything different from what she seemed. In this rude out-of-door life Margaret's fair complexion became sunburnt, and

"Many a soft and quiet grace
Faded from her form and face."

She acquired also a decision and independence of manner totally different from the shrinking shyness which had hitherto seemed a part of her character. Nor could it be otherwise: Margaret has sat in a corner of the public room of a tavern where her father, with half-a-dozen others like himself, were spending six months' wages, in the course of three or four nights and days, on what they called a spree; she heard the rude talk and coarse oaths bandied from mouth to mouth, until finally she succeeded in leading her father at a late hour in a state of intoxication off to bed. Formerly one rude word, from a person who was in even a doubtful state of sobriety, would send the blood mantling into Margaret's cheek, and make her hurry away from the spot, but she learned by habit to hear swearing the most

profane with scarcely a change of countenance, and would daringly push her way into a group of drunken men to obtain resolute possession of her father's arm. These changes were inevitable, but they were only *skin deep*; no more could the evil which she saw and heard contaminate Margaret's mind, than would involuntary contact with the mire of earth sully the white wings of an angel whose mission might be to guard the steps of a mortal through the sins and sorrows of his mundane career. The more she saw, the more she felt his need of some one thus to guard him, so prone was he to be led astray by any, and everything in the shape of temptation. But even at this period she was not entirely without encouragement; she thought she discerned, and day by day more unmistakably, that his frequent lapses were less the result of moral depravity than of incapacity to resist temptation, the force of habit, and an unfortunate sociability of disposition which made him the easy prey of any convivial companion. "The spirit is willing," she would say to herself, "though the flesh is weak;" and at times, indeed, the old man would acknowledge his own shortcomings, and with expressions of such genuine repentance as convinced his daughter that he could not be doomed to be eventually a castaway.

This is how Margaret fulfilled her mission. In thinking of her distant home, and all that she had given up for him—and oh, what a night of sorrow was settled in her eyes!—she blamed no one, she prayed daily for "Edmund," and the children; but even in her heart she did not blame Mr Milner, she accepted the severance of her most precious ties as part of a destiny which no human being could control;

for the rest, she did not admit the thought that she was parted for ever from her husband and her children, but the meeting to which she looked forward was one a very long way off—even in another world.

We forbear to express any opinion as to the soundness of the judgment which guided Margaret in deserting one set of duties for another ; we simply describe what she did. She may, or she may not, have taken a false view of her duty, though, if she did so, it was not to be wondered at in circumstances so complicated as hers, especially as in her mind the reasoning faculty by no means equalled the conscientious.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MRS LANCEFIELD, as we should now call Lydia, was a person who was always finding some good work to perform: it seemed as if more opportunities came in her way than are given to most people, though that might be only that her heart and her eyes were more than usually open to the distresses of others. One morning she happened to be in a grocer's shop, paying a bill or giving an order, having alighted from her carriage at the door. As she stood at the counter, she heard a voice ask for a pound of composition candles, and the tone falling familiarly on her ear, made her glance round. A girl was standing at a little distance, whose dress might be that of a servant-maid; but Lydia had a vague impression of having seen her before; the girl, too, looked earnestly at her, and on catching her eye, timidly curtsied; then, by the readily varying colour, and the shy though ingenuous expression of face, Mrs Lancefield recognised Emily Pryn.

She immediately crossed to where she stood, and, taking her hand, said, "My dear, I am very much surprised to see you here; I thought you were with your aunt in the country." She was surprised at other things also, as she ran her eye over Emily's dress, and the parcel of candles she was about to carry away, but did not say so.

"I was with my aunt," was the reply; "but I am now at Miss Hicks';" and she added the address of a second-rate Sydney boarding-school. Mrs Lancefield thought that if the Misses Hicks employed their pupils to go messages to the grocers, and allowed them to go about the shabby figures poor Emily then was, they must keep an establishment for servant-maids rather than for the education of young ladies: she felt sure there was some mystery under what she saw, and observed,

"You look very thin and pale, Emmy; but you shall tell me all about yourself in the carriage; I will set you down at Miss Hicks'."

Seated in the carriage, she drew from Emily the following particulars:—Miss Pryn, it seemed, had been sufficiently kind to her as long as she continued strong and well, giving no trouble; but about a year ago Emily had gone into very delicate health, and her aunt, growing tired of nursing her, sent her to a boarding-school in Sydney. At first Emily did not dislike the change; the air of her native place did her some good, and she was always pleased to have the means of study within her reach; but after the first quarter, Miss Rubina's remittances entirely ceased, and the head of the school, having for many months received no answer to repeated communications by letter, had gradually withdrawn from Emily all the privileges of a pupil, and now employed her chiefly as a sort of domestic drudge to perform any odd jobs in payment for her board and lodging.

This recital, which was not delivered without considerable hesitation on Emily's part, and an apparent unwillingness to reflect on the conduct of her aunt, excited in Lydia the

strongest indignation ; she felt her own face flush perfectly hot as she thought of the unnatural relative who had turned a girl from her home at the very time when she needed care and nursing, at an age, too, of peculiar delicacy, when there is the strength neither of childhood nor womanhood.

"Perhaps," suggested Emily, "she does not exactly know how things are ; perhaps some of her letters have got lost, or perhaps her station has not been doing well, and she really has not the money to spare."

Lydia thought it was nothing less than beautiful to hear her thus invent excuses for a relative who had behaved so unmercifully to her.

They had now arrived at the door of Miss Hicks' school. "Well, my dear," said Lydia, "I think you must come and pay us a visit ; I shall find out what Mr Lancefield's engagements are, and you will hear from me again in a day or two. Now, I will not ask you to prolong your drive at present."

"No—please don't," said Emily, who seemed fearful of being detained.

As she sat back alone in the carriage, Lydia very quickly laid her plan ; it was nothing less simple than to take Emily at once from school, and cherish and protect her until some other home should turn up for her ; nor did she, in stating her wishes, meet with the slightest opposition from her excellent husband.

Accordingly she very soon again called on the Misses Hicks, and Emily, who had been treated with considerably increased respect since a gentleman's carriage had stopped

at the door on her account, was conveyed away by her friend.

Lydia proposed to Emily that she should fit herself to be a governess, by which means she might obtain a position of independence. Emily entered eagerly into the scheme ; the dread of being a burden on her friends weighed heavily upon her, and it was so clever and kind, she said, of Mrs Lancefield to think of such a nice plan for her.

"I shall not allow her," Lydia observed, "to take any kind of a situation ; we will wait patiently until something really eligible offers ; and besides, she is too young at present."

Meanwhile her time was not thrown away ; Emily had so much taste for improving herself, that she had benefited by every advantage of education that ever came in her way, and Lydia now kindly assisted in perfecting her in various branches. Every morning, while she sat at work, Mrs Lancefield made her young protégée read aloud French or German, she practised duets with her, strengthening and encouraging her playing by her own excellent execution, and she gave her much valuable instruction in drawing, which latter accomplishment was Lydia's especial forte. By the care bestowed upon her, in her new home, Emily regained in a great measure both her strength and spirits, and soon became as great a favourite with Mr Lancefield as she already was with his wife. An atmosphere of kindness and affection was favourable to Emily's improvement both of mind and person ; the former returned a rich harvest to the hand that cultivated it, while the latter shot up in rapid growth, and she gave every promise of turning out a fine girl.

We left Mr Milner on the steps of Charles Lancefield's house, with his mind full of the disordered state of his own family. Being introduced into the drawing-room, where he found Lydia alone and disengaged, he stated the object of his call by remarking that he wished to procure a governess for his children, and thought that Mrs Lancefield might perhaps be able to recommend one.

Lydia weighed the question for some minutes. "I know," said she, "a young person whom I can recommend equally for her principles and her acquirements—but she is very young."

"If her steadiness is to be relied on," replied Mr Milner, "I should not consider youth an objection; she would be a better companion to the children. What is her name?"

"Her name is Emily Pryn."

"Oh! if she is one of that family, she comes of a bad stock," said Mr Milner, prejudiced on the instant.

"I believe," replied Lydia, "that the miserable history of their father has had such an effect upon the children, that they have nothing in common with him except the experience of misfortune."

"And you think highly of Miss Pryn?"

"You will think that I exaggerate," was the reply, "if I tell you how highly I think of Emily Pryn."

There was something of a struggle in Mr Milner's mind; the reluctance which he certainly felt to approve of a governess of the name of Pryn, he would willingly have referred to a justifiable distrust of the principles of the family, while in reality a personal dislike formed the basis of his objection. He was not, however, a man to allow such

feelings to weigh with him unduly, and, after a moment's hesitation, he observed, "The lady who undertakes this situation will be required not only to take charge of my children, but to superintend my household. If I engage Miss Pryn in the capacity we speak of, I shall place her at the head of my establishment."

This was calmly said, and only the pause that followed gave any token that the words had perhaps cost him any effort.

"But," he continued, "you will not consider it any distrust of your judgment if I ask to see her myself, before coming under any promise?"

"For the satisfaction of all parties," replied Lydia; "and if you will dine with us to-morrow you shall see Emily, and judge for yourself before she receives any hint of your intentions."

So seldom for many years had Mr Milner entered any house as a guest, that it was not without effort he could accept an invitation, and to join Charles Lancefield's circle cost him a peculiar effort, so strongly was there brought before him the value of domestic ties; he saw in that house a picture of happiness beyond what he had ever enjoyed, even in the brightest days of that union from which he had expected so much. Between Charles and Lydia there was similarity of taste and of opinion on most matters, and an affection as warm and disinterested as that which in his own early days had induced Mr Milner to overstep all barriers for the sake of his Margaret;—there was all this, but there was also more; there was the suitability which proceeds from equality; there was the harmony of congenial tempers, whose charity was exercised

in a wider range than merely in their intercourse with each other. Charles would scarcely have been so uniformly considerate and forbearing at home, had he been soured and morose towards the world in general; nor would he have esteemed his wife quite in the measure he did, had he not seen that society sanctioned with its approval the choice he had made. Mr Milner did not perhaps discover, in this observance of *les convenances*, the source of the domestic felicity he envied; but he assuredly saw its result in the happiness, the serenity, the polish of Charles Lancefield's home.

It was with a friendly anxiety on her protégée's account that Lydia awaited the conclusion of this visit; for while she felt herself bound in honour not to hint to Emily that anything depended on the impression she produced, she wished from her heart that it might be favourable.

Emily entered the room before dinner with her usual unconscious simplicity, unsuspecting that she was any object of particular attention; and at first sight of her, Mr Milner was much struck with the sweetness and intellectual beauty of her face, though not more so than with the lady-like ease of her manner. It was a trying ordeal to which the young girl was that evening subjected, and one under which many would have failed. Mr Milner entered into conversation with her, and criticised every word she dropped, whether to him or to others, yet was there nothing of which he could lay hold to disapprove, or that seemed to unfit her to be, young as she was, an example and guide to his children. With strangers, indeed, Emily was habitually so reserved, that had Mr Milner judged her solely by her

conversation with himself, he would hardly have done her justice; but encouraged by Lydia's easy kindness, and drawn out by Charles, she showed quite enough of the resources of her mind to convince him that few were more fitted by intellectual endowments for the work of education; while none who beheld the calmness and equanimity with which she bore the many changes of her lot, could doubt that with reference to the highest of all obligations, her pupils would be taught their duty.

"Well, Mr Milner," said Lydia, at the close of the evening, "if you wish for any further opportunity of acquaintance with Emily, I daresay I can contrive"—

"No," he interrupted, "I am satisfied; it was right, in justice to all parties, that I should see her once, but I require no further proof that she is a person whom I may be very glad to obtain as preceptress for my children; and if you will kindly arrange with Miss Pryn, you will not find that any obstacles arise on my part."

In Mr Milner's family Emily found herself possessed of all the comforts that usually belong to the mistress of a moderate establishment; the children were interesting, and soon became fond of her, the servants respectful, and Mr Milner was most considerate; and all these blessings were enhanced by the consciousness that they were in a measure earned, that she was not, as at Charles Lancefield's, eating the bread of dependence.

CHAPTER XXIX.

EMILY PRYN proved to have quite a talent for education, and in the course of the daily lessons of her pupils little debates would often arise which contributed very much to form the minds of the children. In the abridgments of history which they read with her, Freddy always admired the most tyrannical and overbearing characters. He had a great idea, too, of the pleasure of revenge, and would argue with sparkling eyes on the gratification to be found in carrying out one's own will at whatever expense to others. In reply, Emily used to bring forward the mild precepts of the gospel, which forbid the indulgence of retaliation, and took pains to show him the superior beauty of forgiveness and love.

As the time appropriated for reading history was the evening, after tea, it not unseldom happened that Mr Milner was present when such conversations arose; and many a remark from the lips of the young governess, intended for the admonition of his son, found its way to his heart. Uneasy questionings were in consequence raised in his mind; he began to doubt whether he was as right in all his own conduct as he had flattered himself; and this state of feeling reached a climax through a childish incident in which Emily was again unconsciously his instructor.

Freddy fell out with his sister one day in consequence of her having injured one of his playthings, and refused to accept her penitence and be reconciled, which resolution he adhered to with a pertinacity worthy of his father's son. When bed-time came, and he was about to kneel as usual at Emily's knee, she gently stopped him.

"What prayer are you about to repeat, Freddy?" she asked.

"The Lord's prayer," was the reply.

"Then you are going to say, 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us;' that means, in the same degree—neither more nor less—as we forgive others. Now, before you kneel down, let me see you give Edith a kiss."

"No," said Freddy.

"Do you not," asked Emily, "wish God to forgive you for the many naughty things you have at different times done? do you not need His forgiveness of the unkind feelings you have at this very moment towards Edith?"

Freddy was silent.

"Or do you intend to mock God by repeating words to which you attach no meaning? You would, in fact, by using that prayer just now be asking Him not to forgive you. I cannot," she added, "allow you to kneel down until you are reconciled to Edith."

"Then I will rather not say my prayers at all," exclaimed Freddy, bursting into a flood of passionate tears.

Mr Milner did not stay to see his son brought at last to submission; he hastily left the room, and took to his resource of pacing up and down the veranda—a sure sign

with him of a troubled mind. In the impressionable heart of a child, conviction, when once admitted, gains an easy victory; but when the habits of years are to be contended with, the struggle is longer and more painful.

The following day, being alone with his son, Mr Milner suddenly inquired, "Freddy, should you like to write a letter to mamma?"

"A letter to mamma!" repeated Freddy, opening his eyes at the greatness of the suggestion.

"Yes," said Mr Milner, "you can put words together now, and you may tell her that you want her to come back."

So Freddy got his slate and proceeded to compose a rough draft of his letter. This was work for great part of the afternoon, but at length it was accomplished without help from any one, and he carried his slate, covered with large text, to his father. Mr Milner read as follows:—

"MY DEAR MAMMA,—I wish you would come home, you have been away such a long time; and I want you very much, so do Edith and papa"—

Mr Milner paused. "I did not desire you to say anything about me, Freddy?"

"No, papa; but I know you do want her back, so I thought I might as well say so."

Mr Milner hesitated, but let it pass and read on—

"We have got a governess; her name is Miss Pryn. We like her very much; but still we want you, mamma—

every day we want you. I will give you kisses so many when you come, so will Edith.—Your affectionate

“FREDDY.”

“Now, Freddy,” said Mr Milner, when he had finished, “this is very well, except that a good many of your words are wrongly spelt. Shall I correct them for you, or would you rather let mamma see what you can do by yourself?”

Freddy reflected a minute.

“If you correct them, mamma will think I spell better than I do—go as they are.” And Mr Milner was pleased with his son’s honesty.

How dear to Margaret need not be said would be that childish, ill-spelt epistle if it ever reached her; but time passed sufficient for half-a-dozen letters to be received and answered, and no word was received in reply. Mr Milner knew that old Bright might probably have sought employment in the bush, and that the posts of the interior are not always to be relied upon: one letter or the other might, therefore, easily have miscarried; and after waiting impatiently for some time, he one morning entered the breakfast-room dressed, not as usual when going to his office, but for travelling, holding in his hand a small valise. The two children ran up to him.

“Where are you going, papa?”

Mr Milner stooped and lifted little Edith in his arms.

“Going to look for mamma,” said he.

“And to bring her home, papa, please?” urged Freddy, in an imploring tone; the child felt that waiting with hope deferred is weary work.

Mr Milner replied, emphatically, "I hope so," kissed both the children, and was gone.

His first inquiry in Hobart Town was at the General Post-Office, where in fact was his only chance of procuring his wife's address. He was told that a "party" of the name had called every day for about a week to inquire for letters, that at the end of that time she had gone up the country, that her address since had been frequently changed, and one letter had been lately forwarded to her. Mr Milner felt a pang of self-reproach as he pictured her calling day after day, hungry for letters which were never awaiting her. He could see her turning away heart-sick after the brief official negative; his only hope was that she had at last received a crumb of comfort in little Frederick's letter. He wrote down her latest address, which was that of a station in the interior, and thither he lost no time in pursuing her. A steamer took him part of the way, and having landed after a two days' voyage, he proceeded to make the remainder of his journey bushwise on horseback, with no greater encumbrance than his valise strapped to his saddle.

It was fine though hot weather for travelling; his way lay through seemingly interminable forests of gum trees; and riding the whole day he met no human being, the very track being often obliterated, and the sun and his pocket-compass his only guide. Now and then in the deep solitude, a kangaroo would bound before him, or a flock of cockatoos in their snowy whiteness wheel their screaming flight overhead. Mr Milner was a man to note under most circumstances whatever were the peculiar features of the

country through which he passed ; curiosities of vegetable life were not wanting ; here a tree loaded with parasites struck the eye, there festoons of lovely creepers, treasures for a botanist, all unexplored ; but neither scene nor plant offered interest to him, his thoughts were all absorbed in the object of his journey.

The distance was too great to accomplish in one day, and after a ride of fifty miles he stopped at one of those bush houses of accommodation, where, at somewhat exorbitant charges, food and lodging can be obtained for man and beast. Here he ordered a feed of corn for his tired horse, and, having taken the precaution of seeing him eat it, went indoors to refresh himself with some tea, damper, and a tough fowl, which latter was walking about the premises when he arrived. This inn, though its owners drove a not unprofitable business, was in fact a mere bark hut, and the sitting-room, of which Mr Milner found himself the solitary occupant, an apartment of some ten feet square, primitively lined with newspapers, chiefly ancient copies of the *Illustrated News*. In such accommodation, without the resource even of a book, there was nothing for it but to pass the evening as best he could, and Mr Milner feeling rather stiff after his fifty miles' ride, which somewhat exceeds the usual exercise of a Sydney merchant, having despatched his dinner, fell asleep.

The sun was down when he awoke, but a red glare was shining in at the window ; on looking out he perceived this to proceed from a bush fire which was consuming the scrub at no great distance, and illuminated one part of the horizon. Mr Milner had observed the bush to be on

fire as he rode along, but it had very rapidly extended, and now approached so near as almost to threaten the hut. At that time of year, when everything was dry from continued drought, bush fires were of such frequent occurrence as to excite little remark, and the hut, standing in an open space, was not in reality exposed to danger. Nevertheless, all the persons about the place were collected in the veranda, and were talking and pointing in the direction of the scrub. Mr Milner stepped out of the house, and stood for some minutes leaning over the wooden railing of the veranda. It was a striking scene that presented itself to his eyes: the night had come down with the rapidity consequent on the shortness of twilight; the sky was dark, but jewelled with the brilliant constellations of the southern hemisphere; all around was forest and dense scrub, which in one place was a mass of rushing crackling flame.

"As like as not a spark from the old fellow's pipe," observed one of the group.

Mr Milner drew near. "I suppose," said he, "that bush fires are not uncommon in a dry season; the mere friction of the wood is sufficient to cause them."

"Yes, sir, we were only noticing this'n, because of a man and woman who left here this morning, wondering whether they can be clear of the scrub."

"People have got their deaths that way before now," remarked another man; "you see, bush fires always go in circles; so once in, there is no getting out."

"Do you mean," exclaimed Mr Milner, "that there is reason to apprehend any human being is in that scrub?"

"Just so, sir, a-couple lodged here last night, an old

man and a young woman, they started on foot this morning, early—but hark !”—and the landlady held her hand to her ear ; on the breeze was distinctly borne from the direction of the burning scrub a distant coo-ey.

“They are there sure enough, and not far in, but they can’t get through the flames.”

“But they can’t be left there to perish,” exclaimed Mr Milner, “saddle my horse immediately.”

A couple of men turned towards the stables, but Mr Milner strode after them, and acting on the maxim, “if you want a thing done quickly, do it yourself,” set them aside, flung the saddle on to his horse’s back himself, and in a moment was galloping towards the scrub. The coo-ey was repeated as he approached and directed him to the spot where assistance was required ; he urged his horse forward, but the flames rose up in his face and the animal rearing, refused to advance. Mr Milner drove his spurs’ rowels deep into his sides, and by sheer strength of will forced him to enter ; both horse and rider were choked and blinded by the smoke, and Mr Milner felt the flames scorch his face, but through it all he made his way to where two human beings—a man and a woman—were awaiting a horrible death. He stooped from his saddle, and in almost less time than it takes to relate had caught up the female figure, and supporting her before him was forcing his way back. What was it that made Mr Milner’s heart stand still ? He knew, he felt that it was no stranger whom he held there !

Of that moment Mr Milner could give afterwards no description, he knew not what he did, but his feelings he

could recall to his dying day, and even in that brief interval one thought shaped itself into words, "Is this the end?"

He reached the inn—how, he did not know, and some one relieved him of his burden; but Margaret had lain a dead weight in his arms, and she now lay perfectly insensible on the couch where they placed her. They bathed her face with water, tried all the usual remedies to restore animation; and when these proved unsuccessful, Mr Milner, regardless, or rather unconscious of the presence of the persons who were crowding round with assistance, threw himself on to his knees beside her and passionately implored her to open her eyes and speak to him.

But the long dark eye-lashes that lay like a thick fringe on the pale cheek, stirred not—she heard him not. Mr Milner became almost frantic, and for the first time in his life really did not know what he was doing; he called for one remedy after another, until everything that the simple resources of the house could supply had been tried.

The landlady was a rough bush creature, but she had a feeling heart, and with tears running down her own cheeks she did whatever he bade her; long after she, and every one but himself, felt it was useless. At last, however, she drew back from the couch, and said, with a solemnity which arrested his attention, "She is gone, sir, but take comfort, she is with God, and in better keeping than yours."

The last words were intended but as a pious reminder, and spoken in perfect simplicity, yet had his cruellest enemy designed to wound him, he could not have inflicted

a deadlier blow ; to Mr Milner the remark bore a meaning very different from that intended, he uttered an incoherent exclamation, and fell fainting on the floor.

When he came to his senses no person but the woman of the house was with him in the sitting-room ; and half forgetful of what had passed he started up, exclaiming, " Where is she ? is she hurt ? " Then his eyes fell on the door which led into the adjoining bedroom, and he moved towards it ; the woman, however, placed herself in the way, and sought to detain him.

" She can have suffered very little," she whispered, " she is hardly burnt at all."

Mr Milner set her aside and entered, but in sight of the bed he stood still.

There lay his wife ; as the woman said, she was very little injured by the flames ; one side of her face was slightly scorched, and her hair was partially burnt, but that was apparently all ; she must therefore have been suffocated by the smoke, for she was dead.

Mr Milner stood and looked at her until he could look no longer, then he cast himself on to the ground by the bed-side, not to pray, for people in moments of overpowering feeling rarely do pray, but to wrestle with the conflict in his own mind. And as he knelt there it seemed to him but yesterday that he had stood with Margaret as a bride at the altar ; the vows he had broken rose again to his lips ; then there passed as a picture before him all the years of his married life, during which she had been his sweet and loving companion, and again he groaned out, " This is the end ! "

His groan was echoed from another part of the room, and looking up he saw on the opposite side of the bed a figure kneeling within shade of the curtain, a white head bent low in the most abject sorrow. How long he had been there Mr Milner did not care to inquire, but at a movement he made the other started, and at the same moment the two rose to their feet; divided thus by the bed, the husband and parent of her who lay there stood face to face.

They had not met since that day which was a great crisis in the life of each, when Mr Milner had turned his wife's father from his house; and as a recollection rushed upon his now softened heart of all the misery which his harshness had brought on this old man, he felt humbled in his presence.

Their eyes met, and there was a pause, which was broken by Mr Milner, saying, "We are brothers in sorrow."

The old man answered only by a sob.

"Mr Bright," pursued his son-in-law, touched by the sight of grief less controlled than his own, "it is not my place to attempt to comfort you, I have injured you beyond power of reparation."

"As far as your injuries are against me, Mr Milner, I forgive you," was the reply, "they are not greater, nor so great as my sins; may God forgive us both, and may we both meet Margaret in heaven."

"Amen," was uttered in a low and solemn tone by Mr Milner. He extended his hand across the bed, diffidently, for, impressed by the old man's reply, which was different

from what he could have expected, the thought that passed through his mind was, "He may go to heaven yet before me!" The other took the offered hand of reconciliation, and for the first time in their lives these two men felt towards each other mutual sympathy and forbearance.

The night passed, as such nights do in which there is no note of time or thought of repose, and the bright Australian day awoke. The sun, attended in his rising by a thousand sweet scents and sounds, mounted in the summer heaven; the scrubs were filled with the twittering of birds rejoicing in the freshness of which a very few hours of heat would deprive the day; in all the life of various kinds which animated the forest there was at sunrise no sadness or heaviness save in that habitation where beat the only human hearts in the vast solitude around.

Aggravations were not wanting to Mr Milner's affliction, and one effort was demanded of him of a very peculiar nature. At that season of the year burial could not be delayed, and the interment was fixed to take place the same afternoon. There was no consecrated ground within reach, no church in the district, no clergyman within miles; there was no one to read the burial service unless Mr Milner could do it himself. All through the morning ominous sounds were heard in an outhouse; a carpenter was at work; the widower knew the meaning of that hammering and sawing of planks, and several times he pressed his hands upon his ears and took himself out of hearing. At some little distance from the house, on the edge of a vine scrub, a grave was dug, and in the afternoon a decent procession of all the people on the premises bore a plain coffin

to its resting-place in the wilderness. Mr Milner walked apart from the others, carrying in his hand an English prayer-book, and in that desolate spot, in the presence of the eight or ten persons who were gathered round, he went through as great an effort as mortal man was ever probably called upon to endure—he read the burial service over his own wife. And in that grave he buried, not only his love and his hopes for this world, but his pride and his self-sufficiency, all his hardness, all his obstinacy, he stood there an altered and a humbler man. Oh! from that rent and bleeding heart did no prayer for himself mingle with those he read? Yes, this man who had made duty his idol, who had been harsh to others because he believed that he himself did no wrong, stifled beneath a forced calmness the cry, “God be merciful to me, a miserable sinner!”

The rite was finished; the soil had rattled on the coffin, and the group dispersed. Mr Milner lingered a moment, then having given a few brief though decided orders relative to a paling which he wished erected was leaving the spot, when his eye fell on the figure of his father-in-law, who during the service had stood at his side, sobbing like a child; he returned to him, and laying his hand on his arm said, in a voice husky and broken, but in which there was nothing but earnestness and sincerity, “Mr Bright, if you can without looking upon it with too much horror, make your future home in my house, I trust that for the sake of her who is gone you will do so.” And without waiting for an answer he passed on. He saddled his horse himself, settled his account at the inn and rode forth on his homeward journey.

Again the interminable forest lay before him, the dusky hue of the blue gum offered no relief of foliage to the eye, here and there in his path stood a tree scathed by lightning, a leaden sky overhead threatened rain and storm, but the gloom and desolation of nature around him did not equal that which reigned in his own heart.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE run which Gerald obtained was not a bad one in most essential points, but it had not been very long taken up, and every one knows the order in which improvements are made on a newly-occupied station; first the animals are thought of, then the shepherds or bullock-drivers, and lastly the comfort of the masters. Accordingly, Gerald and Inda found themselves obliged to put up with a somewhat rough dwelling, nor had they command of money to add many conveniences: a piece of ground had been ploughed up and fenced in as a garden, but it contained as yet little beyond pumpkins and water-melons. A house-keeper accustomed to the bush might, however, have seen the making of a good deal in the materials at hand; but poor Inda, with the best intentions, did not know how to make the most of things; and when she found herself set down in this slab-built house, with an establishment comprised in a married couple, the man acting as cook, and his wife as waiter and general servant, she was rather at a loss how to proceed.

Day after day the dinner consisted of a piece of beef and a dish of mashed pumpkin or sweet potato, which Mrs Evans, clumping into the room, deposited on the table, regardless of symmetry of arrangement, and when Lucinda

attempted to order the table more in accordance with her own ideas, she was told by her two satellites that Mr Hill, the former owner, and a single man, "had never troubled to have anything fine; he just ate his salt-beef, and that was the way in the bush." Mr Hill, perpetually quoted as a precedent, became a perfect *bête noire* to poor Inda, and the bold assertion, that such was the way in the bush, was unanswerable by her in her ignorance. Could she have visited some other stations she would have seen how nice a bush residence may be made, but they had no lady neighbours, and the only visitors they ever had was a passing traveller, often in red shirt and ferociously bearded, who talked to Gerald of stock and the price of wool the entire evening.

Inda knew particularly little of household affairs. Accustomed to wealth in her father's family, and marrying early a man of fortune, she had never been necessitated to study the details of housekeeping, and her taste did not lie in that direction. She could speak three or four languages, she could play like a professor, but she had not one acquirement that was likely to be of use in her present situation. Inda, however, possessed more than accomplishments and education, she had a great deal of natural intelligence, what Gerald called *gumption*; and seeing that there were many things which, unless she did them herself, would never be done at all, she set to work energetically to make their home more comfortable. Her first exertions were in the cooking department. Gerald was a very poor hand at salt-beef, and when he came home after a long ride, hungry and really tired, it vexed her to see him send away his

plate without having had half a dinner; so she took to studying the cookery book, and a wonderfully-improved table was the result she produced. Inda was not a person to require any encouragement in doing her duty; though had she ever thought that the occupations in which she engaged in her store-room were lowering and unladylike, she might have recalled certain lines of old Herbert's, and comforted herself with the assurance that there is a principle which makes even drudgery "Divine."

Nor was it Inda alone who put a "stout heart to a steep brae." Gerald proved that he, also, had both character and energy; he had gone through a severe ordeal of misfortune, and he had profited by it. No one who saw him riding about the run in his shirt-sleeves, or assisting in the drafting-yard, would believe him the same as the young fop who lounged about Sydney in lavender kid-gloves. He was thankful, after all that had come and gone, to have this new start in life, and, by the ready capacity with which he turned to occupations entirely new to him, promised to become one of the most intelligent squatters in the district.

But we describe nothing so unnatural as a change of character perfected and complete all at once; such wonderfully sudden transformations probably do not take place out of novels, and would be very little to be relied on if they did.

The monotony and seclusion of the bush life, even more than its hardships, chafed Gerald, and at times he kicked hard against the pricks. Occasionally, too, things on the station would go wrong: a native dog would carry off some lambs, the shepherds would abscond, various misfortunes, so well known and so trying to squatters, would occur, and

then his temper was unbearable by any one but Inda. One of Lucinda's greatest pleasures was her correspondence with Mrs Lancefield, who, in the midst of much society and many engagements, found leisure to keep her friend acquainted with what was going on in the world from which she was excluded. They received a post once a week ; and rarely was the mail-bag opened without being found to contain some note, or paper, or number of a magazine for Inda, and these were welcomed by her, not only as proofs that she was loved and remembered, but as really adding very much to her scanty sources of amusement. But to Gerald the post did not afford the same unqualified pleasure as to his wife. He read the periodicals and newspapers, but the latter frequently contained some piece of news which excited his regret at being buried in the bush, and suggested discontented comparisons between his own and the more favoured lot of others. He saw, for instance, that Charles Lancefield was daily coming more and more into notice by his talents ; that he had offered himself successfully as a member of council, and had now, therefore, the dignity of M.L.C. after his name ; and he read a speech of his which had been received with the utmost applause.

"How lucky some people are," Gerald muttered, as he flung the paper from him, "that fellow succeeds in whatever he undertakes." He felt a bitter pang of envy, and was thrown into a fit of ill-humour, which was ready to vent itself on the first incident that occurred. At that inauspicious moment his attention rested on Inda, who was intently bending over a letter she was writing, and his eye caught the first words, "My dearest Lydia."

"What are you so perpetually writing to Mrs Lancefield for?" said he. "I am sure you must say many things about my affairs which you had much better let alone."

"No, indeed, Gerald," replied Inda, "I never write a word about your affairs. I would not think it right."

"But you must," said he; "you can have nothing but the affairs of the station to write about."

"I am sure I don't know what I always find to say," observed Inda, "but I have never any difficulty in filling a letter to Lydia."

"At any rate," said Gerald, impatiently, "I don't care for those very close female correspondences, so just drop it."

Inda at once laid down her pen.

"I won't," said she, "tear up my letter just at once, because, perhaps, you may think better of it, and let me send it after all."

There was no tone of sullenness in her voice, nor the shadow of a cloud upon her brow, and Gerald, after a moment, exclaimed,—

"What a brute I am! Forgive me, Inda, I did not mean what I said; write to your friend, dear, as much as you like."

"Would you like to read my letter," asked Inda, "and satisfy yourself that I say nothing I should not?"

"No," he answered, with feeling, "do you suppose I really distrust you? It is, I think, being unhappy that makes me ill-tempered; you must bear with me, Inda, as you have often done before."

Day by day, however, Inda had less and less to bear; trial was doing its perfect work in Gerald, and all the more

surely because gradually ; true, by the discipline he underwent, life became divested of much of the halo, which had lent it a false glitter in the eyes of his early youth ; imagination became sobered and subdued, he no longer built airy castles for the future, for he knew by experience how untenable such buildings were ; he no longer compared his own lot with that of others, but was satisfied to do the duty which every day brought him. Inda often thought with pleasure how close their misfortunes had drawn them together ; Gerald seemed not to have a feeling but what he shared with her, and looking back upon the time in Sydney when he would sit an entire evening in unsociable silence, chewing the cud of his own reflections, she frequently said to herself how much happier they were now—now they were all in all to each other. Her life, no doubt, was monotonous ; to a woman a bush life must ever be more so than to a man who has variety of out-door occupation ; at times also she had more than enough needlework on hand, for things would wear out when there was no means of replacing them but by her own labour ; but these tasks were cheerfully gone through with, and were, perhaps, good for her as supplying occupation for many hours when she was of necessity left alone. One day she drew Gerald's attention to a new dress she had on, only a printed cotton, every bit of which she had made herself ; what an amount of thought and trouble it had cost her to make it ! for sewing and shaping were among the deficiencies of Lucinda's early education ; she had unpicked an old dress, and cut the other out by it, and she asked Gerald's opinion as to how she had succeeded ;

Gerald told her that she had never looked so pretty in any dress.

The station prospered, and it appeared likely that they would not spend the rest of their lives buried in the bush, but before that day came both Gerald and Inda had learned to love their bush home, and had so many associations with it that they felt they could not leave it without considerable regret. The head station had, in the meantime, assumed the appearance of quite a pretty place; 'as they had a little spare money to lay out, they enlarged the house by a convenient room or two; the garden was well stocked with vines and fruit trees, which (so fast do plants grow in this country) were in full bearing within the space of a few years, a luxuriance of flowers bloomed in the parterres, and graceful creepers embellished the rough posts of the veranda. Sometimes, when she lingered amid her flowers with Gerald of an evening, enjoying the cool sea-breeze which came wafted to them from the distant coast, Inda felt so happy and contented as to wish that not a circumstance of her lot might be altered; she even felt that it would cost her a good deal to leave, in the event of growing rich, that place which they had made, as it were, themselves, but then she would check that thought with the recollection that it was not the spot of ground, but wherever he was that made home for her.

A few years previously, when Inda was suffering under the first bitterness of disappointment in her husband, she would not have ventured to look forward to her present contented state of feeling; when with the shattering of her first idol, she had believed that all poetry at least had

gone from her life ; she would have found it then hard to believe that that young man, so full of faults, provoking in the boyish immaturity of his character, and who had once grossly deceived her, might yet prove,—not again a school girl's ideal, but the worthy object of a woman's love.

On one occasion, Gerald having gone with fat cattle to a township at some distance, returned accompanied by an intelligent-looking lad of about sixteen ; this was young George Pryn, who having come to an age to do something for himself was anxious to begin life in a part of the colony where his father's history was not so well known as in Sydney. Gerald was generous enough to extend a helping hand to the son of the man who had ruined him, and received him on to his station on terms not unusual in the bush, viz., of teaching him the business in return for what assistance he could give. The boy himself was steady and energetic, and trained by the good lessons of Mr Towers, and taught by the misfortunes of his family, bid fair by a career of uprightness and integrity to retrieve the respectability of his name.

The sun was going down upon an English landscape, when two figures, a gentleman with a lady leaning on his arm, might be seen, ascending a wooded path which led by a gentle acclivity to a broad natural terrace. The sinking sun tinted the foliage of a rich extent of wood which lay beneath, and gilded the massive walls of a gray stone mansion ; but no smoke rose from the chimneys of the latter, the building appeared to be uninhabited. The season was midsummer, when nature puts forth her most

prolific growth; the magnificent wood was a mass of foliage, the hedges were a tangled garden of wild roses and honeysuckle perfuming the evening air, while in the soft and mellowed light, which belonged less to the hour than to climate, the commonest objects, every peasant's cottage reposing in its bower of leaves, was a subject fit for a painter's brush.

"England," said the stranger, reflectively, "is a beautiful country, we have nothing like this luxuriance of verdure in Australia; I had almost forgotten how meagre in comparison of such beeches and elms are our gum-trees."

His companion hesitated. "I suppose," said she, smiling, "you will call me prejudiced and narrow-minded if I say that I still like my own country best. But," she then added, with an effort at candour, "for beauty merely, England, I admit, has the pre-eminence; there is here a greenness, a freshness of which I own I had formed no conception."

As they continued their walk they frequently paused, the lady usually to gather merely a spray of wild flowers, but the gentleman to glance round with looks of interest, sometimes of recognition, and on reaching the terrace he stood for a considerable time regarding the scene below, while in his face was an expression of deep, though not unpleasing thought.

Thirty years before, this man, who now was in the prime of life, had stood on the same spot, gazing—child though he then was—with the feelings of an exile on the halls of his fathers, and had exclaimed, while tears filled his eyes, "When I am a man, I will make a fortune and

buy back this place." Unlike the usual fate of early ambition, the day had come when that aspiration could be realised, and, as he stood where we describe that summer's evening, he knew that it was in his power to redeem the inheritance which improvidence and misfortune conjointly had lost so many years before. But with the means of gratifying his wishes a change had come in the wishes themselves, he was more than doubtful of his own feelings, and this was, partly, the subject of his present cogitations.

Charles Lancefield—for he it was,—was at this time on a visit to England, where he found himself, somewhat to his surprise, most cordially welcomed by a large circle of relations; distinguished personages, of whom he retained an indistinct recollection from his childhood, but had not since been reminded, embraced him as their nephew, and invitations to fine country houses and elaborate entertainments in London, flowed in upon him and his wife from all sides. These attentions Charles took for what they were worth; he responded to the advances of his relatives with frankness and easy cordiality, but he remembered that these very people had withdrawn from his father when in adversity, even though the latter was their own brother, and during many years had quietly ignored the existence of their nephews and nieces; he knew, therefore, how to appreciate at their just value attentions shown to him as a rich man. So clear an insight into the motives of others does not perhaps add to the happiness of any one of us, but a painful experience had forced it on Charles Lancefield. His relations, for their part, did probably not

know the worldliness of their own conduct ; at all events, they would not have acknowledged that the reception they gave him would have been very different had he returned poor and in difficulties ; they believed that they liked him solely on account of his pleasing manners and good qualities. " His conduct has been noble," said the member for—; " the way that young man has exerted himself is beyond all praise." Well-earned commendation ; but would the honourable gentleman have recorded as equally meritorious exertions precisely the same which had not been equally crowned with success ? To let that pass, however, his relations were anxious that he should settle among them, and the paternal estate happening to come into the market, they suggested that he should make an offer for it. The proposal was a bait to Charles, and he asked his wife what her wishes were. Lydia's affections were all bound up in Australia ; born as well as bred a colonist, England was to her a foreign country, often in the gray mistiness of its climate her heart yearned for the sunny skies of Sydney ; but she did not say this to her husband, she told him that whatever he preferred would most please her, and Charles knew that she was sincere : the decision therefore rested entirely with himself. Like many colonists, Charles Lancefield retained the habit when abroad of speaking of England as home ; but what, he now asked himself, really makes any country our home ? England was his birthplace, the land of his ancestors and of his own early childhood, but in Australia were spots endeared by associations which no other country could supply : there he had grown from boyhood to manhood, there he had made his first friends,

friends, too, whom for the most part he had proved in adversity, and whose affection he could not doubt, being independent of the accessories of fortune; there the bright dreams of youth had opened upon him, and there he had risen to wealth and honour by his own exertions; it was not until he contemplated leaving the colony for ever that he became aware how deep were the roots which bound him to her soil. He thought of Westleigh, with its sloping lawns and orange groves, where he had walked with his Lydia in the sweet days of first love; of the graves of his parents; of the church where he had been married, and where his children had been christened, and he felt that by every tie, sacred alike by happiness and by sorrow, Australia was his home. Thither he would return, to pursue the profession in which he had already been so successful, and to promote, as far as may be in the power of an individual, the prosperity and progress of that young country. To Lydia his decision was a source of unqualified joy, so, after spending some time in England, enlarging their minds with new ideas, seeing also several parts of the Continent, they again sailed for the southern hemisphere.

Charles Lancefield pursued the career he had chosen; he advanced steadily towards the highest honours which the colony can confer on members of his profession; and he entered largely and usefully into colonial politics; he possessed an income of many thousands a year; and when, at his wife's evening receptions, his handsome rooms were crowded with the first society of the place, and Lydia appeared in his mother's diamonds, he felt that the pro-

phesy which had once stimulated his ambition was fulfilled, that he had achieved a position, and that the last jewels of one family had proved the first of another.

Thus Fortune heaps favours on certain of her favourites; but the happiness of the most perfect human lot has some flaw. There is a grave which bears on its stone a name, and a very brief epitaph to the memory of a youth who died at the age of twenty-one years; to this spot Mr Lancefield occasionally repairs alone, and none of his friends or admirers in the least suspect how sad are the quiet communings which the eminent lawyer holds at such moments with his own heart. In view of that grave, fame, learning, earthly love appear to him but as so many deceits of the world, and he thinks that it will be all the same one day, whether the common bourne of all men be reached through prospering breezes such as favour himself, or after a voyage as short and stormy as had landed his young brother on the eternal shore.

Mr Milner, though not till after a considerable interval, married again, and his wife is none other than a daughter of the man whom he had for years regarded with invincible dislike; little would he once have found it possible to believe that the animosity he nourished so strongly against Pryn would one day merge in the closest of ties; that the daughter of that very man would become first governess to his children, then their friend, and finally his wife. We have traced Emily's history as an oppressed child, a neglected girl, but we leave her a beautiful and radiant young woman. Expanding like a flower in the sunshine; first beneath the

protecting care of Lydia and Mr Lancefield, then happy in her useful industrious life, she attained a perfection of those graces, both personal and mental, of which there had been a dim promise even amid the blighting influences of her childhood. In her Mr Milner has a far more intellectual companion than in poor Margaret, and his own life became considerably altered, shaped more in accordance with the promise of the first years of his residence in the colony. He came forward both in politics and in society, and increased gradually, though never ostentatiously, his style of living. For all this he is very faithful to the memory of Margaret, and mourns for her, and probably will mourn for her to the end of his days; not with such a mourning as renders a man irritable and harsh-tempered, as had been the effect of those rankling grievances which embittered so large a portion of his previous married life, but with a quiet sorrow whose influence is to soften, to make him a milder and a better man. Emily never asks the meaning of the mourning ring he habitually wears, nor would she—if she could—have him lay it aside.

There is a white-haired old man who occupies a seat at Mr Milner's board, kindly treated by the master of the house, and affectionately by his children. Mr Milner has no longer occasion to dread for the latter the example of their grandfather, since Michael Bright is not only a reformed, but a deeply serious character. The impression made upon him by the death of Margaret was very real and lasting, and her lessons, which during her life were attended by a gradually-increasing, though too often inter-

rupted success, speak to him now with the solemnity of a voice from the dead. He seems to desire nothing better in his declining years than to sit in a corner of the veranda, and hear one of his grandchildren read a chapter from the Bible. Nor does the old man meet with aught but kindness and respect from the hands of his son; Gerald is anxious to atone for the past, and often urges his father to spend the remainder of his days under his roof; but Mr Bright clings to the cottage which is associated with the memory of Margaret. He is, however, very sensible of the change in the treatment he receives from Gerald, who is now towards him everything that a son should be.

Gerald and Lucinda returned to Sydney, not to squander their income as before in a vain, ostentatious mode of living, but to take their places as rational and useful members of society, in which they were well received and were fortunate enough to be able to reckon among their acquaintances several very true friends. Gerald lived down the disgrace of his family; or if remembered against him at all, it was only as reflecting additional credit on a young man who, in the face of so many disadvantages of birth and example, had won for himself an honourable position in the world. No shadow of estrangement ever came again between himself and Inda; and she, while joyfully acknowledging her husband now worthy of all her respect, felt for him an affection as warm and true as when he first taught her girlish heart to love.

Of Margaret, Lucinda ever retained an affectionate and even grateful remembrance. She remembered how, when

she was alienating Gerald by her coldness and severity, her sister-in-law had pointed out to her, with a fidelity and candour few would have ventured on, the dangers of the course she was pursuing. But for that faithful warning, where might have been her happiness now? And Lucinda endeavoured to repay the debt of gratitude she owed, by showing unremitting kindness and affection to Mr Milner's once deserted, but no longer motherless, children.

THE END.



